FILIP IVANOVIC

DESIRING the Beautiful

The Erotic-Aesthetic Dimension of Deification in Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor

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Filip Ivanovic

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To the memory of my grandmother Zorka (†2015)

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Acknowledgments

When I began my undergraduate studies in philosophy thirteen years ago, I was already fascinated with the Byzantine philosophical tradition and Greek patristics, especially the early period, now often called "late antiquity," which shows remarkable interaction between philosophy and theology as well as between ancient paganism and what was the newly revealed Christian religion. This fascination led me to write my BA thesis on Maximus the Confessor, and my MA dissertation on Dionysius the Areopagite. These two thinkers have been the focus of my academic interest ever since, and the present book, based on my doctoral thesis defended in December 2014 at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, is its result.

I started work on the thesis in September 2010, when I was awarded a generous research fellowship from the Faculty of Humanities of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim and became an employee of its Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. I was lucky enough to have as supervisors Prof. Sigurd Bergmann, from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and Prof. Torstein Tollefsen, from the University of Oslo, both experts in their field and both students and friends of one of the greatest scholars of Maximus the Confessor, Lars Thunberg, whose book on Maximus's anthropology sparked my interest in the first place. Professors Bergmann and Tollefsen supervised my work with great support and sympathy, and I cannot thank them enough for their dutiful guidance and sincere friendship.

Since the public defense of my thesis, some of its portions have appeared as articles and chapters in journals and edited volumes.[1] I wish to thank the editors for allowing me to use that material in the present book.

1. See "The Eternally and Uniquely Beautiful: Dionysius the Areopagite's Understanding of the Divine Beauty," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 75, no. 3 (2014): 188–204; "Eros as

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Finally, none of my personal and professional endeavors would have been possible without the constant support and selfless love of my family. My doctoral thesis was originally dedicated to my mother's mother, Zorka Vukčević, to whom I am indebted for her ceaseless care for my education and upbringing ever since my early childhood. After having been able to hold the thesis in her own hands and to rejoice in her grandson's success, she passed away peacefully a month later. Thus, this book is dedicated to her loving memory.

November 2017

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a Divine Name in Dionysius the Areopagite," in *The Ways of Byzantine Philosophy*, ed. M. Knežević (Alhambra, Calif.: Sebastian Press, 2015), 123–41; "Maximus the Confessor's Conception of Beauty," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 22, no. 2 (2015): 159–79, with permission of Springer; "Union with and Likeness to God: Deification According to Dionysius the Areopagite," in *Visions of God and Ideas on Deification in Patristic Thought*, ed. M. Edwards and E. Vasilescu (London: Routledge, 2017), 118–57.

Abbreviations

CCSG	Corpus Christianorum. Series graeca, Turnhout: Brepols, 1977–.
PG	Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne. Paris.

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INTRODUCTION

Plato wrote that the beginning of philosophy is the feeling of wonder at the world,[1] while in another instance he proclaimed the notable dictum that philosophizing is in fact preparation for death.[2] Thus, for Plato, philosophy begins in wonder and ends in death. However, this death is not the destruction of being, a fall into nothingness; on the contrary, death implies the liberation of pure thought by which the immortal soul gains the highest forms of knowledge. Bodily death, therefore, represents a passage from corruptibility and mortality toward their opposites. Wonder, truth, knowledge, immortality, and practice, as the elements pertaining to philosophizing, outlived the famous founder of the Academy and found their expression in the system of the Christian faith revealed a few centuries after his demise. Despite the obvious hostility between paganism and Christianity, Greek Christian thinkers did not completely abandon their philosophical inheritance; rather, they recognized its value. Thus, Clement of Alexandria would say that "there is no absurdity in philosophy's having been given by Divine Providence to the Greeks as a preparatory discipline for the perfection which is through Christ."[3] The purpose of philosophy remained the same—dying to the corrupted, impassioned world and reaching immortality; and the practical side of philosophy came to be identified with ascetic efforts.[4]

1. See Plato, *Theaetetus*, 155D.

2. See Plato, *Phaedo*, 64A.

3. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, trans. William Wilson, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), *Stromateis*, VI.17.156.

4. See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 126–44.

Equally, the Athenian philosopher talked about love—eros—in terms of generation in the beautiful with the scope of reaching immortality. On a similar note, Christians proclaimed that God is love, and turned love into one of the central themes of their speculations. In addition, they established the creation of the world in the image of God and affirmed its beauty as the image of the beauty of the Archetype, and finally, they put all their efforts into emphasizing the final goal of all creation, namely the achievement of immortality and the idea of human beings becoming gods.

Love, beauty, and immortality have never stopped astonishing humankind; and thought regarding these concepts has been present since the very beginning of human reasoning, be it philosophical or mythical. However, the contemporary world in its postmodern state has forgotten the importance of inquiry into what are called, often ironically, "perennial" questions. Love is thus abundantly investigated in its appearances, in terms of sexual desire or biological impulses and psychological processes, but it becomes less and less important for a genuinely philosophical, or metaphysical, discourse. Similarly, beauty is considered mainly from the perspective of artistic production, and even in this sense it has lost its value, as emphasis is placed on works of art as representing the truth, which more often is ugly rather than beautiful, as if truth and beauty somehow have to be opposed to each other. As for immortality and deification, it seems valid to quote Küng's forty-year-old sentence: "But does a reasonable man today want to become God? … Our problem is not the deification but the humanization of man."[5] In this regard I posit that if ancient philosophical and theological traditions can teach us something, it is not to view deification and humanization as opposites but rather as complementary, as the two sides of the same coin. For thinkers of this period, man becomes fully human only when he becomes God, and humanity can be deified only when it realizes its full human potential.[6]

The brief and rudimentary notes presented above are what led me to inquire into the concepts that became the subject of this book. This idea is evident from its very title—I purposely opted for the word "erotic" in-

5. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 442.

6. An explanatory note might be needed here: The reader will notice that throughout my work I use interchangeably the terms "man," "human beings," "humankind," and "humanity," which imply that I refer to the entire humankind, composed of both men and women. My use of "man" is not limited to the male members of the human race, but should be understood as synonymous with the "human being." Many classical authors, Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor included, use these terms in the same way, as referring to both men and women.

stead of, for example, "agapic," since I believe there is much more to recall about eros than is present in our contemporary mindset. Similarly, I chose the word "aesthetic," as I am convinced of the need to re-vindicate the concept of beauty, but not just that—if I had in mind just beauty I could have used the term "kallistic,"[7] but my intention was also to point to the sensible dimension of beauty, and the place of the body and matter in deification, because for Christian authors, the entire human person, composed of both soul and body, becomes deified, and sensible material objects play an important role in this process. Finally, I decided to explore these concepts within the main exponents of the doctrine of deification, who greatly contributed to its consolidation and transmission in posterity. Therefore, this book will examine three concepts—love, beauty, and deification—through two late-Antique philosopher-theologians, namely, Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor. In the following sections I shall briefly present the aims and methods, introduce the concepts and the authors studied, and conclude with a brief note on materials, that is, texts and translations used.

Some Remarks on Aims and Method

The main aim of this study is to explore the most important feature of Dionysius's and Maximus's thought: their teaching of deification, the peak of Christian soteriological speculation. This teaching has been the subject of more or less thorough investigation in previous scholarship. Therefore, I made the decision not only to present a general overview of the teaching in our two thinkers, but also to offer insight into its relation with two other significant aspects of their systems, namely erotology and aesthetics. My goal is to show that it is impossible to completely comprehend deification without taking into account the roles of love and beauty therein. By the end of my exposition, I hope that it will become clear how love and beauty are basic metaphysical concepts whose meaning and use span the entire philosophical-theological structure of Dionysius's and Maximus's thought. With that in mind, I have structured the book in such a way that it will allow us to arrive gradually at this conclusion, by treating each of the basic concepts, namely love, beauty, and deification, independently in both authors, in order to be able to collect different elements of our exposition

7. See Georg W. F. Hegel, *On Art, Religion, Philosophy: Introductory Lectures to the Realm of Absolute Spirit* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 22.

and combine them into a synthetic vision of the erotic-aesthetic dimension of deification.

I have undertaken this task for the purpose of not just exploring these notions for their own sake, but also of showing how they need not be understood anachronistically as something that belongs to the past and is just worth studying in terms of a historical quest; on the contrary, I believe that there is a place for the re-appreciation of love and beauty, even in our contemporary world, which has perhaps lost the ability and desire to grasp the value of once essentially important concepts. Dionysius and Maximus show that for them love and beauty transpire throughout all human intellection and action, as they appear to be in the core of a human and cosmic constitution, and represent a link not just between the creatures, but even between divinity and creation, intelligible and sensible, visible and invisible worlds; they are, in fact, Dionysius's and Maximus's testimony that the entire world is created by divinity and that to divinity it shall all return.

Since I had before me a plan to study three concepts in two authors, I have decided to present them chronologically and systematically, in the sense that I first explore them in the Areopagite, and then in the Confessor, followed by a synthesis which allows me to also employ the comparative method. The core of our task stands, of course, in the texts and their interpretation, so my method is unavoidably hermeneutical as well. That said, it is of the utmost importance to preserve the integrity and context of the texts examined, and I shall therefore offer ample textual citations, followed by my interpretation; in this way, the texts will speak for themselves, so that the reader will be able to approach them him- or herself.

Who?

Dionysius the Areopagite

Dionysius the Areopagite is one of the most controversial and most mysterious authors in Christian intellectual history. It has been firmly established that the author of the group of writings known as *Corpus Dionysiacum* was not the famous Dionysius, judge of the Areopagus, convert of St. Paul, as mentioned in the Bible (Acts 17:34), who later became bishop of Athens. All attempts to ascribe a historically known name to the hidden author have so far been unsuccessful, and therefore there is nothing that can give us a concrete clue regarding his personal or intellectual biography. Despite

certain facts that have come to light with to modern research, Dionysius the Areopagite remains an enigma. Probably thanks to his pseudonym, but also to the content of his thought, his writings have gained an eminent place in the history of philosophy and theology. The contents of his works have been cited by many as the ultimate authority, second only to Christ and the Apostles, on different questions and issues that have emerged throughout the history of Christianity. On the other hand, his philosophical style and close relationship with Neoplatonism have raised concerns regarding the reliability of his name. Thus, the Areopagite's thought remains floating between the highest Christian authority and a pseudonymous impostor having less to do with Christian faith than with Neoplatonic philosophy.

The content of the *Corpus*—in the form that was transmitted to us—includes four works and ten letters. The four works are *The Divine Names*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, and *The Mystical Theology*. The letters, whose addressees are probably fictitious, including the one to John the Evangelist exiled in Patmos, present Dionysius's condensed thought on issues such as the knowledge and ignorance of God, divine transcendence, the mystery of Christ, apophaticism, and the hierarchical arrangement of the Church. We should also note that Dionysius talks about several other works of his, which either have fallen into obscurity or were never written.[8]

The short and dense character of the letters serves, in fact, as a synthesis of the Areopagite's thought, and it is thus not surprising that Paul Rorem, in his commentary on the *Corpus*, decided to use them as an introduction to other works and present them as a preview of Dionysius's entire system.[9] The themes of the letters point to the discussions that would be explored at greater length in the other works. The main method by which Dionysius proceeds is by stressing the tension between God's transcendence and his immanence in the world, and these two main divine characteristics are approached and dealt with through the famous dialectics of apophaticism and cataphaticism. In brief, cataphatic theology acknowledges God's immanence and presence in the world, through a variety of manifestations, and thus states that any name can be ascribed to God. Apophatic theology, on the other hand, states that no name can be applied to God, thus accepting God's absolute transcendence and stating the unknowability and

8. See Salvatore Lilla, "Introduzione allo studio dello Ps. Dionigi l'Areopagita," *Augustinianum* 22 (1982): 541.

9. See Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7–46.

ineffability of his nature. Cataphatic theology is the method employed in *The Divine Names*, where Dionysius explores different appellations of God, such as being, love, beauty, justice, peace, zeal. *The Mystical Theology*, on the other hand, points to divine ineffability and deals with divine darkness as the ultimate goal of the soul's mystical ascent to God; in fact, this ineffability and unknowability is perhaps the reason why this is the shortest treatise in the *Corpus*.

It should also be noted that the word "hierarchy" was Dionysius's invention. In the context of his writings, the word of course does not have the same meaning that it has acquired in modern times, but its significance is more literal—it means sacred order. This sacred order is applied to heaven and earth, and thus Dionysius wrote his hierarchical treatises, one dedicated to the ecclesiastical, more appropriately "our," hierarchy, and the other dedicated to the celestial, heavenly hierarchy. The former consists of priestly and lay ranks, which subdivide through the ranks of bishops, priests, and deacons in the priestly order, and monks, the sacred people, and those not yet initiated in the lay order. This earthly hierarchy is an image of the celestial one, which consists of seraphim, cherubim, and thrones (the first order), and principalities, archangels, and angels (the second order). All of these orders have their appropriate activities consisting in illumination, purification, and perfection, and each higher rank possesses its own specific activity as well as the activities of the lower ranks. The purpose of the hierarchy, as Dionysius claims, is union with and likeness to God, which he actually identifies with deification. He also feels strongly about the proper arrangement and order of the hierarchies, which is the prerequisite for the right function of the hierarchy, as staying in one's own ascribed place and performing an assigned activity is of the utmost importance for accomplishing the goal of deification.[10]

Therefore, God's transcendence and immanence, explored through apophatic and cataphatic theologies, the achievement of the divine darkness and the cloud of unknowing, together with hierarchical arrangement and activities, are, in short, the main features of Dionysius's thought, which will come to light during our exploration of his understanding of love, beauty, and deification.

10. See Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Continuum, 1989), for a short but informative introduction to Dionysius's thought. See also Lilla, "Introduzione"; Salvatore Lilla, *Dionigi l'Areopagita e il platonismo cristiano* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), 167ff.

Maximus the Confessor

If Dionysius is one the most controversial Christian writers, Maximus the Confessor is certainly one of the most acclaimed Greek Fathers of the Church. Unlike the Dionysian case, we have an abundance of sources regarding both Maximus's personal life and his intellectual path, though not without controversies. While it has been established that Maximus was born in 580, and died in 662, controversies surround his origin and course of life, and stem from the two versions of his *Life*, one being Greek, the other being of Syriac origin.[11] According to the Greek version, Maximus was born at Constantinople, in a well-off family, and received a good education in philosophy and related disciplines. He even advanced in the civil service and eventually held the position of first secretary of the Imperial Court. However, philosophy and theology appealed to him so much that he decided to leave the imperial service and become a monk at the monastery of Chrysopolis, thus dedicating his life to the Church. The Syriac version presents a quite different account of the Confessor's life, according to which, Maximus was born out of wedlock, as the love child of a Samaritan and a beautiful young Persian slave girl. Forced to flee, the parents escaped to the village of Hefsin, where the local priest, Martyrius, baptized them. Apparently, Maximus also had a sister and a brother, who both died early in the Confessor's life, while he continued at the monastery of Palaia Lavra. This version, unlike the tenth-century Greek *Life*, was contemporary to Maximus and was probably written by George of Reshaina during the Monothelite controversy, which would also explain its hostile and unappreciative tone, given the fact that Maximus was the greatest opponent of Monothelitism. Since controversy over the Confessor's life is not the scope of our study, suffice it to say that I tend to agree with the majority of scholars who deem the Greek *Life* to be more authentic, while regarding the Syriac version as a Monothelite attempt to blemish the biography of their main opponent,[12] although it has to be admitted that some new studies have rather convincingly argued for Maximus's Palestinian origins.[13] This

11. See Sebastian Brock, "An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor," *Analecta Bollandiana* 91 (1973): 299–346.

12. See, for example, Aleksei Sidorov, "Nekotorie zamechaniya k biografii Maksima Ispovednika," *Vizantiyskiy Vremennik* 47 (1986): 109–24; Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3–6.

13. "From the mass of circumstantial detail two clear points emerge: first, that Maximus was (like Moschus and Sophronius) a Palestinian monk, and not a Constantinopolitan aristocrat (even if he spent some time within the capital); and second, that despite his non-Constantinopolitan origins

opposition to a heresy accepted even by the emperor cost Maximus dearly through several trials and severe punishments, such as the mutilation of his tongue and right hand, as well as exile. But he stood firmly in his teachings, which were finally accepted in 680, at the Council of Constantinople, the Sixth Ecumenical Council, although the proceedings of the council did not acknowledge their debt to the Confessor.

The ecclesiastical and political circumstances of that time, as well as Maximus's monastic calling, determined also the character of his written works. Unlike Dionysius, Maximus does not offer many systematic treatises, and elements of his system of thought are fragmented and scattered throughout his works, which consist of questions and answers, short chapters, letters, and interpretations of difficulties.[14] However, the task of assembling a synoptic view of his thought is possible, though not easy. Since this has been subject of a variety of studies, I shall present just a few characteristics of Maximus's thought.

His main preoccupation was the defense of Orthodoxy against controversies which struck at the core of Christological doctrines, such as the doctrines of one will and one energy in Christ. Maximus did his best to defend both wills, human and divine, in one hypostasis of Christ. This is also one of the greatest contributions of our author to the doctrinal, as well as historical, development of Christianity. Simply speaking, his teaching promoted the full affirmation of the two natures in Christ—and consequently the two wills and energies. The basis of his teachings on will and energy is therefore Chalcedonian Christology, which states that both natures, human and divine, are united in hypostatic union, that is, united but unmixed. They both preserve their characteristics, but are united into one person, the second person of the Trinity. Thus, Maximus argues that to each nature corresponds a natural will, but that these two wills, natural human will and divine will, are in accordance with each other. What differentiates Christ from other human beings is that, unlike others, he does not have a *gnomic* will, which corresponds to the mode of existence, and is closely related with free choice. The most distinctively human characteristic is self-determination,[15] from which Maximus also develops an im-

he soon operated (like Moschus and Sophronius) in close contact with the highest representatives of the Roman state." Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2014), 155.

14. See Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth, "A New Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor," in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. P. Allen and B. Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 19–83.

15. See Joseph Farrell, *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor* (South Canaan, Penn.: St. Tikhon's

portant feature of his anthropology by stating the human task of according one's will with the divine, that is, of orienting gnomic will toward natural will, which then corresponds to harmonizing one's mode of existence with one's *logos* of nature.

This *logos* points to a specific exemplarist doctrine, which Maximus develops in detail and according to which each being is created after a *logos*, a divine idea, preexisting in God, so that all *logoi* are in fact contained in one Logos. In this way Maximus builds a specific ontology and cosmology, with the *logos* theory as the principle of his metaphysical system, which, however, has deeper implications that span across anthropology, ethics, soteriology, etc. The *logos* of being as a preexistent idea is also a carrier of the purpose of being and an inscription of the divine plan. However, man in his present fallen state has deviated from the *logos*, that is, his mode (*tropos*) of existence is not in accordance with the *logos*. The task, then, of human beings is to harmonize their modes of existence with their *logoi* of being, which is a task leading to salvation and is effected through a variety of epistemological, ethical, cosmological, and ecclesiological elements. The true example and model of this harmony is Christ, Incarnated God, who came to earth for the purpose of salvation of his creation, out of his immense love. Christ, the new Adam, therefore showed how man should and can reconcile all the divisions of the world and bring it to a unity with God. This is Maximus's famous teaching of man as mediator, whose task is to reconcile five main divisions: male and female; Paradise and the inhabited world; heaven and earth; intelligible and sensible creation, and finally, God and creation. All of these mediations have their basis in Christology and the union of natures in Christ. In addition, Maximus believes that human mediation is realized through deification. Thus, it appears that the main subjects of the Confessor's interest are God, man, and the world, as well as their union in difference through mediation and deification.[16]

Seminary Press, 1989); Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

16. Cf. Georgi Kapriev, *Maksim Izpovednik: Vvedenie v mislovnata mu sistema* (Sophia: Iztok-Zapad, 2010); Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 3–74.

INTRODUCTION

What?

Love

Love is probably one of the most fascinating themes to occur throughout the entire history of humankind. It is not just an object of mere speculation but of action as well, and it is both intellectual and experiential, deeply personal and encountered on a daily basis in one's life. It therefore is not surprising that love has been the subject of description and speculation from the primitive societies up to modern times. Philosophy, theology, anthropology, literature, psychology, and even neurology, and medicine in general—they all have provided us with a vast quantity of investigations, analyses, presentations, and other forms of inquiry concerning the subject of love. In its various forms, love has acquired different sets of attributes and characteristics, which span from the mystical, divine, motherly, and brotherly, to romantic love and selfish self-love. Love's intrinsic connection with birth and generation has given to it existential significance, which can be traced from the very generation of the world down to the birth of a single being. Different speculations on and experiences of love lead us to conclude that it always has an object—we love someone or something—and this implies that the proper understanding of love is rooted in the proper understanding of otherness. As Dillon states, regarding erotic love, "what separates authentic erotic love from narcissism is the otherness of the other."[17] This other, be it a person or a thing, may be physically present in space and time, but it may also be absent—such as, for example, the continued love for our beloved dead ones. However, what interests us most here is love as related to the "otherness of the other"—while this might be easily understood and described in the sense of love for persons or things, what about the radically and absolutely Other, whose otherness is an ontological otherness, transcendent and incomprehensible? Even though our love for other human beings, pets, or inanimate objects does not pose easy questions, perhaps the most difficult to grasp and present is the love of God for man and the love of man for God.

While it is certain that "men, women, and gods loved and were loved before Christ,"[18] it seems nevertheless that Christianity has made love a

17. Martin C. Dillon, "Romantic Love, Enduring Love, and Authentic Love," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 66, no. 2 (1983): 146.

18. Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1.

crucial theme of its speculative and empirical activity. Of course, classical literature offers many examples of the love theme, for instance, Plato dedicated some of his dialogues to it, and Aristotle went to great length in dealing with friendly love, but it seems somehow that all of this was a precursor to the total incorporation of love into human life and thought with the coming of Christianity. The very proclamation that God is love must have had a great impact on Christian thinkers, who found the discourse on love to be an unavoidable part of any genuine philosophical-theological (and pastoral) preoccupation.

Love's "essence can easily be confused with what accompanies it or is its consequence,"[19] and the object of our inquiry in this book will be precisely the "essence" of love as seen by our two authors, Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor, which, nevertheless, cannot escape dealing also with its consequences or accompanying elements. As a matter of fact, the way Dionysius and Maximus see it, love's major consequence, of course, is creation, but even more emphasized is deification, man becoming God, as the ultimate goal and purpose of all humankind. It would therefore not be possible to speak of love in abstract, purely philosophical terms, since for our authors love has very concrete consequences which coincide with (eternal) life itself, representing a way in which such life is achieved. This idea, undeniably, is not completely new; early Christian thinkers had a strong basis for their speculation in the previous tradition, which was founded not only upon the Scriptures, but also on the philosophical explorations of love undertaken by ancient philosophers. Thus, as we progress through this study, we shall quite often go back to Plato, Aristotle, or Plotinus, among others. We shall also explore the different terminologies applied to love, that is, ἔρως, ἀγάπη, and φιλανθρωπία, and see how these terms work together in Dionysius's and Maximus's systems, ranging from ontology and cosmology to ethics and soteriology. Finally, our presentation will enable us to understand better the crucial role of love in the ultimate salvation and deification of humankind.

Beauty

Intrinsically connected to the topic of love is the concept of beauty, as something that attracts, incites, and excites, and is therefore an object of the quest which is seen in terms of erotic dynamism. This relationship is

19. Edward C. Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 35.

quite present in Plato's thought, as he presents beauty as the object of love, which, rather than being possessed (the lower form), should be contemplated (the higher form) or, so to say, contemplatively possessed. In this way, the erotic desire for beauty represents the way to achieving immortality. However, beauty is also closely related to the senses, as it is something perceived by the sense, or, in Socrates's words, beautiful is that which is pleasing to sight or hearing.[20]

As Tatarkiewicz argues, the history of beauty presents three conceptions thereof, 1) beauty in the broadest sense, including moral beauty; 2) beauty in the purely aesthetic sense, which evokes the aesthetic experience and includes both mental and physical products; and 3) beauty in the aesthetic sense but restricted to its visual aspect.[21] The understanding of beauty that marked classical Greek and, later, Christian tradition is no doubt the first, that is, beauty in its broadest sense. The classical idea of beauty also implied goodness and perfection, so that it was defined—as in Leon Battista Alberti—as that to which nothing can be added or taken away without destroying it.[22] It included physical as well as spiritual beauty, and it was related to moral values as well. Beauty as perfection, as related to goodness and the moral virtuous life, is what Christian authors, Dionysius and Maximus included, perceived as the right understanding of beauty. While such an idea was not forgetful of beauty's sensible character,[23] it nevertheless placed emphasis on the transcendent and absolute character of beauty, which itself was the object of their thought; and it was only in this light that physical beauty, the beauty of the created world, could be properly understood. In the specifically Christian context, our authors see God as absolute beauty and as ultimately lovable and desirable. The created world, together with all the creatures inhabiting it, is beautiful inasmuch that it was created by God. Human beings, as created in the image of God, are beautiful as well in the same way. However, since it is not absolute, the beauty of the world cannot be the ultimate goal of aesthetic speculation and experience. On the contrary, the beauty of the world is the image of the beauty of its creator, and in this way it represents a reminder, an invitation, to go further and beyond in order to reach the One who is Beauty itself.

20. See Plato, *Hippias Major*, 298A.

21. Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz, "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31, no. 2 (1972): 166.

22. See Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria: On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Robert Tavernor, and Neil Leach (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), VI.2.

23. Cf. Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 22–26.

The undeniably sensible character of the world points to another important feature of our authors' thought—the world is a theophany, a manifestation and revelation of God, who, though being absolutely transcendent and unknowable, chose to make himself present in the world. This presence of God is perceived through bodily, physical, material objects which appeal to our senses and thus reveal the divine presence. For both Dionysius and Maximus, God mingles not only with intelligible, but also with sensible things. These represent a concession to our fallen nature which cannot be purely contemplative, as it is linked to the body, and thus it has pedagogical and anagogical significance, as it educates man about his true origin and purpose and uplifts human beings to divine heights. Furthermore, God, as absolute beauty, is also absolutely desirable and ultimately lovable, so that he incites creatures' motion and draws everything to himself. This motion ceases only upon reaching its goal, the desirable, which is found in the union of God, by which the creature retains its natural characteristics but becomes God itself. In this way, the beauty of God and the beauty of the world represent yet another aspect of Dionysius's and Maximus's soteriological thinking, that is, the aesthetic dimension of deification.

Deification

The patristic concept of deification (θέωσις) has long been a controversial issue in the history of Christianity.[24] The term as such does not appear in the Scriptures or in the Apostolic teachings, and it was considered by many as an embarrassing aberration of Greek patristics, due to its close relationship with pagan Hellenism. Brought into connection with the ancient Roman custom of deifying emperors and worshiping them as gods, in terms of the god-emperor and goddess-Rome,[25] the idea of deification certainly could seem as a "disastrous flaw in Greek Christian thought,"[26] and all those who support such teaching as "guilty of pushing a paradox into the realms of the nonsensical."[27]

24. See some recent collected volumes on deification: *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 1, ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2006); *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2011); *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007).

25. See Panayiotis Christou, *Greek Orthodox Patrology: An Introduction to the Study of the Church Fathers*, trans. George Dion Dragas (Rollinsford, N.H.: Orthodox Research Institute, 2005), 46ff. See also Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 16–23.

26. Benjamin Drewery, *Origen and the Doctrine of Grace* (London: Epworth, 1960), 200.

27. Benjamin Drewery, "Deification," in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp*, ed. P. Brooks (London: SCM Press, 1975), 52.

Fortunately, the attitude toward this doctrine has changed over time, but still, the conclusion that deification is a result of Hellenization of Christianity is not completely unfounded: it is a specifically Greek Christian teaching, and some antecedents can be found in pagan Hellenic philosophical traditions. The Pythagorean teaching of reincarnations, ascetic practice, and metempsychosis led to the belief in immortality and an individual's rebirth as a deity. In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates famously says that man should escape from earth to heaven, which means becoming as much as possible like God through justice, purification, and understanding.[28] Aristotle, too, speaks of the possibility of reaching relative immortality and moments of divine bliss,[29] and thus Jules Gross writes that Aristotle "has taken up the thought of Plato, whereby true happiness for humankind consists in their assimilation to God, in their divinization," but still, according to Aristotle's idea of the negation of personal immortality, "this supreme happiness is inaccessible to humankind in actual practice."[30] A certain idea of deification, in terms of mystical union, was adopted later by Neoplatonists, and Plotinus himself presented a description of his own mystical experience.[31]

While it is true that, as previously mentioned, deification as such does not appear in the Scriptures, there are, however, certain scriptural passages that can be used as a basis for the Christian idea of human beings becoming gods. With this in mind, the Psalms say, "You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you" (Ps 82:6). Some other passages state, "when all things are subjected to him, then … God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28), or "he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world" (2 Pet 1:4), and again God "will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Phil 3:21).

The Greek thinkers of the first centuries A.D. therefore had a solid basis, found in both philosophical tradition and Scripture, on which they could build the teaching of partaking in God and becoming like God, that is, to be by grace what God is by nature. Thus, these ideas appear already in Phi-

28. See Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176BC.

29. See Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, ed. Werner Jaeger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), XII.7, 1072B; *Ethica Nichomachea*, ed. J. Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), X.7, 1177B.

30. Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers* (Anaheim, Calif.: A&C Press, 2000), 46.

31. See Plotinus, *The Six Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), IV.8.1. Hereafter, *Enneads*.

lo, a Jewish philosopher, from whom they are passed on to the Christian sphere and are taken up by Justin Martyr, who talks about immortality as the ascension to a divine status.[32] The teaching was further complemented by Irenaeus of Lyons and Hippolytus of Rome. The latter two thinkers gave a more solid basis to the doctrine of deification, and so Adolf von Harnack comments:

> But in yet another respect Irenaeus and Hippolytus denote an immense advance beyond the Apologists, which, paradoxically enough, results both from the progress of Christian Hellenism and from a deeper study of the Pauline theology, that is, emanates from the controversy with Gnosticism. In them a religious and realistic idea takes the place of the moralism of the Apologists, namely, the deifying of the human race through the incarnation of the Son of God. The apotheosis of mortal man through his acquisition of immortality (divine life) is the idea of salvation which was taught in the ancient mysteries. It is here adopted as a Christian one, supported by the Pauline theology (especially as contained in the Epistle to the Ephesians), and brought into the closest connection with the historical Christ, the Son of God and Son of man (*filius dei et filius hominis*). What the heathen faintly hoped for as a possibility was here announced as certain, and indeed as having already taken place. What a message! This conception was to become the central Christian idea of the future.[33]

From Irenaeus and Hippolytus the doctrine of deification was further developed in Clement of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, the Cappadocians, and received its fullest expression through Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor, who eminently introduced it to the Byzantine sphere and are seen as the doctrine's consolidators and main exponents. Their elaboration of deification would represent the unavoidable basis for all future discourse on deification, up to the fourteenth-century great hesychast Gregory Palamas. Thus, the history of deification is long and perhaps slow, and as Myrrha Lot-Borodine, the author of one of the first overviews of deification, wrote, it appeared as "seed that came from afar, thrown in beautifully prepared soil, and slowly germinating under the earth."[34]

32. See Eric Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 114ff.

33. Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1901), vol. 2, 10–11.

34. Myrrha Lot-Borodine, *La déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des pères grecs* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 23: "semence venue de loin, jetée dans un terrain admirablement préparé, et qui germera lentement sous terre."

Status quaestionis

Dionysius and Maximus could well be the most studied Greek fathers, and the scholarship dedicated to them has significantly increased in the past decades. This could be especially said for Maximus who has inspired a great deal of academic publications in the past twenty years. As for Dionysius, he always attracted scholarly interest, due not only to his masterful thought, but also to the veil of mystery that still covers the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. For now, I would like to mention some general studies that might be considered as valuable summaries of Dionysian thought. Among the oldest are the works by René Roques, who studied the structure of the universe in Dionysius,[35] and Placid Spearritt, his mystical thought.[36] Andrew Louth authored an introductory study into Dionysius's system,[37] and in this short book he gave broad insight into some of the key features of the Areopagite's theology, such as liturgy, hierarchy, divine darkness, and names of God, thus producing one of the most synthetic and highly valuable studies on Dionysius. To this should be added an article by Salvatore Lilla, rich, among other things, in cross references to Dionysius's sources.[38] An immense work was done by Paul Rorem who, after his thesis on Dionysius,[39] published a volume containing a commentary on the entire *Corpus Dionysiacum* and notes on its influence on posterity.[40] Although I do not agree with Rorem on several points,[41] this book represents a great contribution to Dionysian scholarship and a successful attempt to make his thought more accessible. In a recently published book, Christian Schäfer provides a thorough study of the Dionysian philosophy in exploring the structure and contents of his *Divine Names*, and then placing this work within the overall scheme of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.[42]

However, despite the abundance of material on Dionysius the Areopagite, only a few studies are directly relevant to the topic of the present

35. See René Roques, *L'univers Dionysien* (Paris: Aubier, 1954).

36. See Placid Spearritt, *A Philosophical Enquiry into Dionysian Mysticism* (Bösingen: Rotex-Druckdienst, 1968).

37. See Louth, *Denys*.

38. See Lilla, "Introduzione."

39. See Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984).

40. See Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*.

41. Such as his insistence on man's passivity in the uplifting process to God; see Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*, 54–57.

42. See Christian Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise "On the Divine Names"* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

research. Here I would like to mention some of the works which will be discussed more broadly in the course of this research. Hans Urs von Balthasar dedicated a significant portion of the second volume of his *Theological Aesthetics* to Dionysius, where, with great sympathy, he analyzed Dionysian aesthetics, liturgiology, and symbolic theology.[43]

Caroline Putnam's thesis is the only monographic study dedicated to the concept of beauty in Dionysius,[44] and so, despite the fact that it was written half a century ago, it nevertheless represents a valuable contribution to Dionysian aesthetics, though with a clearly recognizable Thomistic reading, in which different aspects of beauty are examined, such as its characteristics, and its relation to participation and causality. Nevertheless, Putnam does not explore her subject in the context of concepts with which my study will be concerned, namely, love and deification.

The Dionysian concept of love has been the subject of several articles exploring different contexts of the subject. In his article, Gabriel Horn presents love in its triple definition—as an eternal circle, as ecstasy, and as a force of union and cohesion.[45] John Rist's article draws on the famous Anders Nygren book[46] and aims at correcting Nygren's idea that Dionysius just substituted Platonic *eros* for Christian *agape*, because Eros was the reality he knew.[47] Lisa Buckley and Eric Perl in their articles try to expound Dionysius's ideas on love against his Neoplatonic background and in the context of his overall metaphysical system.[48] Similarly Lidia Denkova reads Dionysius in comparison with Plato.[49] To this should be added an article by Cornelia De Vogel, in which she argues for the Dionysian transformation and correction of Neoplatonic theology, precisely regarding the idea of eros.[50]

43. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 2, *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984), 144–211.

44. See Caroline C. Putnam, *Beauty in the Pseudo-Denis* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1960).

45. See Gabriel Horn, "Amour et extase d'après Denys l'Aréopagite," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 6 (1925): 278–89.

46. See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. P.S. Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953).

47. See John M. Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 20 (1966): 235–43.

48. See Lisa Marie Esposito Buckley, "Ecstatic and Emanating, Providential and Unifying: A Study of the Pseudo-Dionysian and Plotinian Concepts of Eros," *The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 31–61; Eric D. Perl, "The Metaphysics of Love in Dionysius the Areopagite," *The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 6, no. 1 (1998): 45–73.

49. See Lidia Denkova, "Philosophie de l'Éros chez Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Études balkaniques* 1 (1994): 129–40.

50. See Cornelia J. De Vogel, "Greek Cosmic Love and Christian Love of God: Boethius, Dionysius the Areopagite and the Author of the Fourth Gospel," *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981): 57–81.

Monumental work has been done by Ysabel de Andia in her various publications,[51] but especially in her monograph on the union with God according to Dionysius.[52] In this rich volume, Andia presents the Dionysian idea of *henosis*, both in his originality and in light of his predecessors (Plotinus, Proclus, Gregory of Nyssa, and others), as well as in different aspects of the concept, such as union and deification, union in the unknowing, and the *unio mystica*. She also dedicates certain space to the ideas of beauty and love within the concept of union,[53] but she concludes that the relation between love and deification will only reach its fullness through Maximus the Confessor.[54]

The recently published thesis by Vladimir Kharlamov also deals with the question of deification in Dionysius.[55] In this work, Kharlamov mainly draws on the predecessors of the Areopagite, extensively discussing the concept of deification in ancient Greek philosophy, Neoplatonism, and patristics. In the concrete examination of the Dionysian idea of deification, the author explores θέωσις in its ontological-metaphysical, epistemological, and sacramental-anthropological aspects, albeit with little, if any, reference to love and beauty. In addition, only the latter half of the book is dedicated to the topic contained in its title, while the first half deals with pre-Dionysian pagan and Christian treatment of deification.

A similar revival of interest in Maximus the Confessor's thought has been evidenced by numerous publications since the second half of the twentieth century.[56] Among the first systematic treatments of Maximus's thought, an important place should be given to the 1946 study by Hans Urs von Balthasar, which represents a synthetic presentation of the Confessor's theology.[57] However, despite his obvious interest in aesthetics, Balthasar did not treat this topic in his book. Significant interpretative work was done also by Polycarp Sherwood in his analysis of the earlier *Ambigua*.[58]

51. See, for example, her collection of essays, Ysabel de Andia, *Denys l'Aréopagite: Traditions et métamorphoses* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2006).

52. See Ysabel de Andia, *Henosis: L'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

53. See ibid., 123–33, and 145–67.

54. See ibid., 430–31.

55. See Vladimir Kharlamov, *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole: The Concept of Theosis in the Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

56. Within pre-war scholarship we might mention two works by Sergey L. Epifanovich, namely *Prepodobniy Maksim Ispovednik i vizantiskoe bogoslovie* (Kiev: Barskii, 1915), and *Materiali k izucheniyu zhizni i tvoreniy prepodobnogo Maksima Ispovednika*, (Kiev: Univ. Sv. Vladimira, 1917).

57. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

58. See Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Rome: Herder, 1955).

One of the greatest contributions to the study of Maximus's thought is no doubt the 1965 thesis by Lars Thunberg written at the initiative of John Mayendorff, and dealing with the theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor, which was published in a new edition thirty years later,[59] but it still represents an unavoidable reference for any serious study of Maximus. While the study of the Confessor's theological anthropology could not eschew such important topics as love or deification, Thunberg's account of the latter is rather fragmented and does not offer a systematic insight into the topic.[60]

Work dedicated to Maximus's conception of love, more specifically to the idea of self-love, was done by Irénée Hausherr, who makes valuable points on the mystical and ascetic aspects of the subject, and provides useful translations into French of many significant passages, which, in my opinion, constitute perhaps the most important contribution of this book.[61] Also worth mentioning are a couple of doctoral theses written by French scholars Juan Miguel Garrigues, François-Marie Léthel, and Alain Riou, which deal with love, human freedom, and the Church, respectively.[62] However, despite the doubtless value of these studies, the authors seem to be more interested in reading their own Thomistic perspectives into Maximus's thought than in exploring it in its own right; and thus they fail to comprehend the totality of the Confessor's thought, as their focus is on presenting him as a predecessor to Aquinas. Such attempts have been thoroughly criticized by Marcel Doucet.[63] An attempt to synthesize Maximus's cosmological, anthropological, and ecclesiological doctrines was made by Nikos Matsoukas in his 1980 book in Greek, which was later translated into French.[64]

An important contribution to understanding the theme of deification

59. See Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995). Thunberg also published a shorter version, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

60. On love, see Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator,* 309–22; on deification, see specifically 427–32, although the theme appears throughout the text.

61. See Irénée Hausherr, *Philautie: De la tendresse pour soi à la charité selon saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Rome: Institutum Oritentalium Studiorum, 1952).

62. See Juan Miguel Garrigues, *Maxime le Confesseur: La charité, avenir divin de l'homme* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976); François-Marie Léthel, *Théologie de l'agonie du Christ: La liberté humaine du fils de Dieu et son importance sotériologique mises en lumière par saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979); Alain Riou, *Le monde et l'église selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1973).

63. See Marcel Doucet, "Vues récentes sur les 'métamorphoses' de la pensée de saint Maxime le Confesseur," *Science et esprit* 31 (1979): 269–302.

64. See Nikos Matsoukas, *La vie en Dieu selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Axios, 1994).

in Maximus is represented by Eric D. Perl's unpublished thesis, wherein the author treats his topic of creation, incarnation, participation, and deification in dialogue chiefly with the Neoplatonists and Dionysius the Areopagite.[65] This study sheds a good deal of light on Maximus's thought, both in its originality and in its relation to the tradition, though it does not examine in full the erotic and aesthetic aspects of its theme. Thanks to the work of Paul Blowers, many aspects of Maximus's thought came to light, especially in Blowers's study of the *Questions to Thalassius*, as well as in his works on the Confessor's psychology.[66] Jean-Claude Larchet's *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur* represents a monumental work on the topic of deification, examined in significant detail through anthropological, Christological, ecclesiological, and ethical points of view.[67] While the aspect of love is very much present in this study, it does not offer any insight into the concept of beauty and its place in the Confessor's thought.[68]

We should also mention a series of books on Maximus the Confessor published as part of the Oxford University Press's Early Christian Studies series, which includes contributions by Torstein Tollefsen, Melchisedec Törönen, Demetrios Bathrellos, and Adam Cooper.[69] These publications revealed the growing academic interest in Maximus, and study various aspects of his thought from both philosophical and theological perspectives, which allows us to gain a solid understanding of the Confessor's overall metaphysical system in its different dimensions. As is evident, the scholar-

65. See Eric D. Perl, *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor* (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1991).

66. See Paul M. Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor: An Investigation of the* Quaestiones ad Thalassium (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991). See also his articles "Gentiles of the Soul: Maximus the Confessor on the Substructure and Transformation of Human Passions," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 1 (1996): 57–85; and "Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of 'Perpetual Progress,'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 46, no. 2 (1992): 151–71. A noteworthy contribution to Maximian studies is Blowers's most recent work *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), which unfortunately could not be integrated into the present book which was already completed at the time that Blower's book was published.

67. See Jean-Claude Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Cerf, 1996). See also his general introduction into Maximus's thought, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Cerf, 2003).

68. On love, see Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme*, 477–82 and 522–26.

69. See Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ;* Adam Cooper, *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

ship on Maximus the Confessor continues to grow, and many significant contributions have been published in the past few decades, which prevents us from presenting them on a large scale here.[70] However, for a good thematic exposition of different studies, I direct the reader to Maria Luisa Gatti's overview of Maximian scholarship,[71] while for an exhaustive and the most updated bibliography, I point to Mikonja Knežević's recent detailed reference work.[72]

A Note on the Sources

The texts on which this work relies are complex and difficult to read, so their correct understanding is essential for any serious study. This, however, presents the issue of language and translations used.[73] Despite my deep reservations and concerns, I have decided to use Colm Luibheid's translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.[74] I am aware that this translation sometimes paraphrases more than represents an accurate transmission of the original, however, I adopted it because it is the most recent and most readily available translation of Dionysius's works. While I could appreciate the possible objection that a new translation is needed, and that such a translation of quoted passages might have been done by me in this study, I must note that such an endeavor would constitute an entirely new project and go beyond the scope of my work. I have, however, tried to keep a close eye on the Greek original and to amend citations or add additional terms that fit better with the original. As for the Confessor's works, I used the available translations by Sherwood (for *Centuries on Love* and *Liber asceticus*),[75] Andrew Louth (for *Letter* 2 and *Opuscules* 3 and 7),[76] Paul Blowers

70. I should also like to mention the proceedings of two large conferences dedicated to Maximus's thought, held at Fribourg in 1980 and at Belgrade in 2012: *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, ed. Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schoenborn (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1982); and *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection*, ed. Maksim Vasiljević (Alhambra, Calif.: Sebastian Press, 2013).

71. See Maria Luisa Gatti, *Massimo il Confessore: Saggio di bibliografia generale ragionata e contributi per una ricostruzione scientifica del suo pensiero metafisico e religioso* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1987).

72. See Mikonja Knežević, *Maximus the Confessor (580–662): Bibliography* (Belgrade: Institute for Theological Research, 2012).

73. As for the critical editions in the original language, these can be consulted in my bibliography.

74. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

75. See Maximus the Confessor, *The Ascetic Life. The Four Centuries on Charity*, trans. Polycarp Sherwood (New York: The Newman Press, 1955).

76. See Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*.

and Robert Wilken (for *Questions to Thalassius* 1, 2, 6, 17, 21, 22, 42, 60, 61, 64),[77] George Berthold (for *Mystagogy*, *Commentary on the Our Father*, and *Chapters on Knowledge*),[78] Despina Prassas (for *Questions and Doubts*),[79] and Nicholas Constas (for *Ambigua*).[80] I also benefited from François Vinel's French translation of the complete *Questions to Thalassius*.[81] In addition, for some passages, I used translations present in the secondary literature, and these are identified in the footnotes to each passage. If a passage's citation does not correspond to any of the above identification directions, then the translation is mine. The translations of other classical works can be identified in the appropriate section of the bibliography.

77. See Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Christ*, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert L. Wilken (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003).

78. See Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

79. See Maximus the Confessor, *Questions and Doubts*, trans. Despina D. Prassas (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009).

80. See Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, 2 vols, trans. Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

81. See Maxime le Confesseur, *Questions à Thalassios*, 2 vols., trans. François Vinel (Paris: Cerf, 2010–12).

PART 1 DIONYSIUS the Areopagite

CHAPTER ONE LOVE

The Dionysian discourse on love develops over three levels, each of which applies to terms, God, and human beings, respectively. These concern: 1) the terminological determination of love, exemplified in the relationship between ἔρως and ἀγάπη; 2) love as a divine name, that is, "God is Love"; and 3) human love expressed through hierarchies. One point of interest, expressed on the first level, is that Dionysius almost always uses the term "eros," even when referring to what is usually designated "agape."

Eros or Agape?

Widespread discussions on the meaning and usage of the terms ἔρως and ἀγάπη have provided a conclusion that the former is used in ancient Greek thought and that it has earthly connotations, a meaning of desire, while the latter represents genuine selfless Christian love. Though it is true that the widespread term for love in ancient philosophy is ἔρως, one cannot truly agree with the exclusive and absolute distinction between the two terms in the late antique and medieval periods. The thesis of Anders Nygren on the difference between ἔρως and ἀγάπη as a clear demarcation line between paganism and Christianity[1] is greatly exaggerated, and, besides the importance of this work, it testifies more to the agenda of the author than to a real and proper understanding of the issue.[2] Although Nygren himself, in the introduction to his book, admits that these terms became so interwoven

1. See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*.

2. See Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape"; Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, throughout the book; De Vogel, "Greek Cosmic Love," 61: "Obviously the Swedish theologian had not the faintest idea of what the spirit of Platonism was. But even the 'love of God' among Christians appears to him a rather suspect affair."

that it was impossible to speak of either without being drawn to the other, he nevertheless claims that "it is most important to insist on the original absence of any relation between Eros and Agape."[3]

This conception has led Nygren to explain Dionysius's use of eros in the sense that it "was the reality he knew, so he naturally preferred to speak of the thing by its right name,"[4] thus implying that Dionysius's reality was eros of ancient thought, namely Neoplatonism, while the opposite term of Christian "agape" was unfamiliar to him, that is, it did not represent his particular reality.

However, if one turns to Dionysius himself and his texts, it becomes clear that he knew both realities very well—he was fully aware of the term "agape," and not just that: he knew that equalizing eros and agape would provoke a number of misunderstandings, and so not only did he provide an answer to the possible opposition of his time, but he also anticipated Nygren's conclusions. Being aware as he was of the relationship between the two terms, Dionysius consciously decides to proclaim them as synonymous: "So let us not fear this title of 'yearning' (ἔρως) nor be upset by what anyone has to say about these two names, for, in my opinion, the sacred writers regard 'yearning' and 'love' (ἀγάπη) as having one and the same meaning. They added 'real' to the use of 'yearning' regarding divine things because of the unseemly nature such a word has for men."[5] Clearly, Dionysius here shows his awareness of the possible confusion that eros might introduce, and therefore he warns the reader that he is talking about the "real" eros, and not the defective, divided one:

> The title "real yearning" is praised by us and by the scriptures themselves as being appropriate to God. Others, however, tended naturally to think of a partial, physical, and divided yearning. This is not true yearning but an empty image or, rather, a lapse from real yearning. The fact is that men are unable to grasp the simplicity of the one divine yearning, and, hence, the term is quite offensive to most of them. So it is left to the divine Wisdom to lift them and to raise them up to a knowledge of what yearning really is, after which they no longer take offense.[6]

However, what exactly is the Areopagite's intention here? Is he just trying to equalize his own reality with a reality not so familiar to him, in

3. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 31.

4. Ibid., 589n2.

5. Pseudo-Dionysius, "The Divine Names," in *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), IV.12, 709B. Hereafter, *De divinis nominibus*.

6. Ibid., IV.12, 709BC.

Nygren's words, or is he developing a cunning and masterful plan to introduce pagan terminology into Christianity, as some have claimed?[7] The answer is none of the above, because Dionysius, in the first instance, is an enlightener, a revealer, as many later Fathers used to call him, and a teacher. His main intention is to reveal certain truths that he holds to be important, and then to pass on knowledge significant to the proper understanding of Christian doctrines. He reveals that eros and agape are one and the same, and these terms can be used interchangeably and synonymously. But he is also aware of the difficulty this might create, so he clearly distinguishes the true, "real" eros from its divided, partial counterpart. In doing so, he is obviously keen on preserving ancient terminology, but he does not hesitate either to point to its appropriate and true use. Therefore, besides revealing the unity of eros and agape in God, the Areopagite also acts pedagogically, as a teacher explaining to his pupils the terms and their correct use and meaning. Thus, the true opposition is not between eros and agape, but between "real love" and "divided love,"[8] since Dionysius himself says: "In my opinion it would be unreasonable and silly to look at words rather than at the power of the meanings."[9]

The source of Dionysius's use of eros is most probably ancient philosophical, namely, Neoplatonic, thought, but he nonetheless struggles to show that this use is justified even in the Christian sphere. Thus he is delighted to be able to quote the scriptural passage "Yearn for her and she shall keep you; exalt her and she will extol you; honor her and she will embrace you" (Prv 4:6–8), and a phrase from the deuterocanonical Book of Wisdom "I yearned for her beauty" (Wis 8:2), as well as Ignatius's proclamation "My Eros is crucified."[10] Dionysius is not the only one who quotes Ignatius for this purpose as it was done previously by Origen, in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*: "Indeed I remember that one of the saints, by name Ignatius, said of Christ: 'My Love is crucified,' and I do not consider him worthy of censure on this account."[11] Obviously both Dionysius and Origen interpret this phrase in the same way—Eros here refers to Christ,

7. See Carlo Maria Mazzucchi, "Damascio, autore del *Corpus Dionysiacum* e il dialogo Περὶ πολιτικῆς ἐπιστήμης," *Aevum* 80 (2006): 299–334.

8. See Andia, *Henosis*, 148.

9. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.11, 708BC.

10. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature, 1886), 7:2, although this quotation could compromise Dionysius's pseudonym since Ignatius died around 107 A.D.

11. Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson (New York: The Newman Press, 1957), prol., 71.

and so they both use it to justify the possibility of naming God as eros and as agape, that is, as "amor" and as "caritas."[12]

In justifying his preference for eros, Dionysius points out that "indeed some of our writers on sacred matters have thought the title 'yearning' to be more divine than 'love.'"[13] This stance is taken by Gregory of Nyssa who, in his work on the Song of Songs, claims that eros is a more intense form of agape,[14] although he usually uses both terms interchangeably, which in fact prompted Nygren to conclude that "Agape in Gregory is but another name for what is otherwise called Eros."[15]

What Origen, Gregory, and Dionysius did is, in fact, build their ideas about love upon the previously construed basis, provided by biblical-Christian and ancient philosophical traditions. The thinkers' cultural and religious background made it possible for them to use particular words, experiment with their meaning, and construct new ideas. Their insistence on the synonymy of eros and agape, together with their elaborations on the issue, testify that they knew both terms very well, not just their meaning, but also their intellectual history. Thus, one cannot conclude with Nygren that Dionysius did not know what agape was, since it was not his reality, nor one can agree with Horn that agape lost its force and became irrelevant by the sixth century.[16]

The ancient sources of the Areopagite's concept of love are more evident. Although these will be examined more thoroughly in the following sections, for the present purpose it would be useful to provide some brief remarks on them. Eros played an extremely important role in ancient

12. Some scholars claim that Origen's (and Dionysius's) understanding of Ignatius's phrase is not correct, as he does not refer to Christ when speaking of eros, but in his words eros means a desire for earthly things. So "My Eros is crucified" would mean that his desire for earthly things is destroyed (see Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 390; De Vogel, "Greek Cosmic Love," 72–73). However, as Rist has argued, the phrase (ζῶν γὰρ γράφω ὑμῖν, ἐρῶν τοῦ ἀποθανεῖν. ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρως ἐσταύρωται, καὶ οὐκ ἐστιν ἐν ἐμοὶ πῦρ φιλόυλον) rather means that he desires death because Christ has been crucified and therefore true love is to be found through death, that is, he desires the same fate as Christ has accepted (Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape," 243n22).

13. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.12, 709B.

14. See Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum*, Homily 13, in PG 44, 1048C. Gregory prefers the term φιλανθρωπία for expressing the idea of agape.

15. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 440.

16. See Horn, "Amour et extase," 279. In "Greek Cosmic Love," 60–61, De Vogel writes: "The history of the classical word φιλεῖν, so frequently found in the Socratic dialogues, is that in the connotation of 'loving' it went more and more out of use from the fourth century B.C. onward, while ἀγαπᾶν was more and more used instead of it. That as early as the second century B.C. ἀγαπᾶν was the common word for 'loving,' both in the spoken and in the written language of everybody, is a verifiable fact. There is nothing 'sacred' about it, and the New Testament use of the term is by no means an almost isolated fact."

Greek mythology and philosophy. As the son of Poverty and Plenty, he is a daimon, half way between god and man, and he always searches for something he lacks.[17] However, the concept of eros goes far beyond that, starting with Plato and continuing through to Neoplatonic philosophy.

In the *Symposium* Plato goes further than the usual concept of eros as an acquisitive desire in order to arrive at an eros which is not a desire for any desirable object, but a desire for an object that is good, and which refers to the standard of absolute and eternal good.[18] Furthermore, it is not just a desire for good, but a desire for a *perpetual* desire of good; thus this desire stops being an acquisitive eros and becomes a creative one instead.[19] In the *Phaedrus* this eros leads the lover toward working on and adorning the beloved as if he were an image of the patron god, and thus both the lover and the beloved become more like the god himself.[20] Therefore, this love is not just a selfish need, but a desire for absolute good and beautiful. A similar image is present in Plotinus, who, however, directs the lover to work on his own statue in order to make himself perfect. In addition, he attributes eros to the Good: "He is at once lovable and love and love of himself."[21] In later Neoplatonism, Proclus is more limited than Plotinus, in that he ascribes love to a certain kind of god, but not to the One, which is unparticipated.[22] As a god, Eros is given a place in Proclus's system within the Pistis/Aletheia/Eros triad, springing from the "Paternal Nous" (πατρικὸς Νοῦς), but it is not the first and ultimate Principle.[23]

Given these brief considerations, it comes as no surprise that Dionysius felt it possible to combine both his philosophical and Christian backgrounds even in his erotology. However, he does not appropriate the ancient philosophical inheritance without any modification; on the contrary, he reshapes it to a certain extent and incorporates it into his own Christian worldview. In his equal use of eros and agape, the Areopagite does not apply these terms only to God, he also uses them side by side when speaking

17. See Filip Ivanovic, "Ancient EROS and Medieval AGAPE: The Concept of Love in Plato and Maximus the Confessor," in *Greek Philosophy and the Issues of Our Age*, vol. 2, ed. K. Boudouris and M. Adam (Athens: Ionia, 2009), 93–114.

18. See *The Symposium of Plato*, ed. R. G. Bury (Cambridge: Heffer and Sons, 1909).

19. See Arthur H. Armstrong, "Platonic Eros and Christian Agape," *The Downside Review* 79 (1961): 107.

20. See Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *Platonis Opera*, ed. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), 252D–253D.

21. Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.8.15.

22. See Eric D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2007), 45.

23. See De Vogel, "Greek Cosmic Love," 67–69.

about the creation's love for God: "And so it is that all things must desire, must yearn for, must love [ἐφετὸν καὶ ἐραστὸν καὶ ἀγαπητὸν] the Beautiful and the Good."[24] It is not just that the Good is an object of desire, yearning, and love, but also the Cause of everything is divine love, understood as eros and agape.

Divine Love and Different Forms of Love

As already mentioned, Dionysius takes up the theme of divine love in the fourth chapter of his *Divine Names*. He discusses it together with Good and Beautiful, which already implies a tight connection between the three. In the previously quoted phrase, Dionysius finishes the discourse on good and beautiful: "And so it is that all things must desire, must yearn for, must love, the Beautiful and the Good." He then proceeds to the discourse on love:

> Because of it and for its sake, subordinate is returned to superior [ἐπιστρεπτικῶς], equal keeps company with equal [κοινωνικῶς], superior turns providentially to subordinate [προνοητικῶς], each bestirs itself [συνεκτικῶς] and all are stirred to do and to will whatever it is they do and will because of the yearning for the Beautiful and the Good. And we may be so bold as to claim also that the Cause of all things loves all things in the superabundance of his goodness, that because of this goodness he makes all things, brings all things to perfection, holds all things together, returns all things. The divine longing [ὁ θεῖος ἔρως] is Good seeking good for the sake of the Good.[25]

It is possible to identify in this passage four types of love or, to be more precise, of erotic movement:

1) ἔρως ἐπιστρεπτικός, which goes from inferiors to superiors, by way of return (conversion).
2) ἔρως κοινωνικός, which represents the relationship between equals, by way of communion.
3) ἔρως προνοητικός, which goes from superiors to inferiors, by way of providence.
4) ἔρως συνεκτικός, which is the love of each being for itself, by way of conservation.

24. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.10, 708A.
25. Ibid., IV.10, 708AB.

It is also possible to trace this scheme to its ancient origins, which Cornelia De Vogel reconstructs as follows:

> The first of these four kinds is Plato's ἔρως extended to everything in nature. As to the second, this recalls Boethius's *foedus perpetuum* and *socia fides*. The words κοινωνία, ὁμόνοια and φιλία for the interrelations of the elements and things on earth are of Pythagorean origin. . . . Evidently it is the late form of Pythagoreanism, fused with Plato's later doctrine, in which both Stoic and Aristotelian elements have been incorporated. . . . The third kind . . . is the love of a higher, divine being toward those of a lower level. It is certainly not the notion of providence which is surprising: Divine providence was a very important dogma both for Plato and in the Stoa, and for Plotinus and the Neoplatonists as well. . . . It is Dionysius's fourth kind of love which in particular brings us back to the Stoa: the ἔρως συνεκτικός of natural objects for themselves appears as an extension of the οἰκείωσις which by the Stoics was attributed to all living beings.[26]

Although providence and love do play a role in Plotinus's system, they are however never combined. While the One does provide for what he creates, it cannot be argued that the One actually loves his product. In the *Enneads* it is said that "we breathe and hold our ground because the Supreme does not give and pass but gives [provides] on for ever, so long as it remains what it is."[27] But besides the fact that Plotinus here does not use the term "eros," he does not describe the One as a subject, but only as an object of love whereby love is a property of the soul: "Love [is] an act of a Soul seeking good, [and] this Love [is] leader of the particular Souls to the Good."[28] As a result, "all that exists desires and aspires toward the Supreme by a compulsion of nature, as if all had received the oracle that without it they cannot be,"[29] while the One "remains, then, poised in wisdom within itself; it could not enter into any other; those others look to it and in their longing find it where it is."[30] It is clear how eros constitutes an important part of Plotinus's philosophy, but it nevertheless seems that the idea of a providential love ascribed to the One has to be dismissed:

> Plotinus also teaches that "life is a universal power," for life is here synonymous with love and desire, and this desire for the Source, this love which has for its object the supreme Principle, is universal: "All that is begotten desires and loves the

26. Cornelia J. De Vogel, "Amor quo caelum regitur," *Vivarium* 1 (1963): 15–16.
27. Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.9.9.
28. Ibid., III.5.4.
29. Ibid., V.5.12.
30. Ibid., VI.5.10.

one who begot it." But the converse is not true: the One is in no way comparable to a generous god who would create the world out of goodness or love, because then love would mean an attachment of the One to the inferior, to something other than himself. If there is, of course, an erotic dynamism at the source of the procession, a dynamism whose principle is Self-love, in the inferior, this dynamism is reversed in love for the begetter. Indeed, the infinite love that has the One for object is identical to the immense power and the infinite force that comes from the Source, identical to "life which is an unlimited and universal power."[31]

The source of Dionysius's terminology in the first and third kinds of erotic movement seems to be Proclus, by whom our author is greatly influenced—in his *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*, Proclus says: "And gods then love gods, the superior ones the inferior ones, but providentially [προνοητικῶς], and the inferior ones love the superior ones, but revertively [ἐπιστρεπτικῶς]."[32] However, it has to be noted that the Neoplatonic philosopher does not ascribe providential love to the One itself, but only to gods inferior to the One. In his *Elements of Theology*, he speaks of the providence of gods:

For all other things which are posterior to the Gods, act providentially through the participation of them: but providence is connascent with the Gods. For if to impart good to the subjects of providential activity is the prerogative of the providential peculiarity, but all the Gods are goodnesses, either they do not impart themselves to anything, and thus nothing will be good in secondary natures. And whence will that be derived which subsists according to participation, except from those natures which primarily possess peculiarities? Or, if they do impart themselves they impart good, and because of this providentially attend to all things. Providence, therefore, subsists primarily in the Gods. For where is the activity which is prior to intellect, except in superessential natures? But providence [πρόνοια], as the name signifies, is an energy or activity prior to intellect [ἐνέργειά ἐστι πρὸ νοῦ]. The Gods, therefore, by reason of their essence, and because they are goodnesses, provide for all things, filling all things with the goodness which is prior to intellect.[33]

In *The Theology of Plato*, Proclus expresses an idea that could be related to Dionysius's second movement of love, ἔρως κοινωνικός: "Such therefore, in short, is divine beauty, the supplier of divine hilarity, familiarity, and

31. Agnés Pigler, *Plotin, une métaphysique de l'amour: L'amour comme structure du monde intelligible* (Paris: Vrin, 2002), 87.

32. Proclus, *Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*, ed. Leendert G. Westerink (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1954), 55–56. Hereafter, *In Platonis Alcibiadem*.

33. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, trans. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), prop. 120. Hereafter, *Elementa theologiae*.

friendship. For through this the Gods are united to and rejoice in each other, admire, and are delighted in communicating with each other and in their mutual replenishings, and do not desert the order which they are always allotted in the distributions of themselves."[34]

Through beauty, therefore, gods are united and communicate with each other. In addition, beauty is strictly connected with love since it "converts and moves all things to itself, causes them to energize enthusiastically, and recalls them through love," and as a result "it is the object of love, being the leader of the whole amatory series, walking on the extremities of its feet, and exciting all things to itself through desire and astonishment."[35] It is possible, then, to conclude that in Proclus's view those gods inferior to the One are linked through a kind of reciprocal love, although this is not defined in terms of ἔρως κοινωνικός, which is Dionysius's innovation.[36] It should be mentioned, however, that, as De Vogel notes, "the term ἔρως … is absent from the *Elementa Theologiae* and hardly occurs in the *Theologia Platonica*, and this while the whole apparatus of such terms, as προνοητικός, ἀγαθοιδής, σωστικός, τελειωτικός, and συνεκτικός, is fully present in those works."[37] From this standpoint, De Vogel concludes that eros was not essential to Proclus's theology. On the contrary, Perl argues that this does not make Dionysius essentially different, since it would mean concentrating on expression, instead of meaning, because "everything Dionysius *means* by ἔρως is centrally present in Proclus."[38]

While this might be a valid argument, especially if one considers the Areopagite's own opinion that "it would be unreasonable and silly to look at words rather than at the power of the meanings,"[39] a certain "suspicion" has to emerge—is it not curious that Proclus does not use the notion of ἔρως in his theological works, particularly if he already gave an important place to those terms that Dionysius would later pair with his concept of love? It would be quite unfair to assume that Proclus simply avoids this theme for no specific reason, or that he does not consider it important, since the discourse on love definitely appears in his other works. The reason stands in his metaphysical system which makes a distinction between

34. Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, vol. 1, trans. Henri-Dominique Saffrey and Leendert G. Westerink (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1968), I.24. Hereafter, *Theologia Platonica*.

35. Ibid.

36. Cf. Pietro Podolak, "L'amore divino nella tradizione platonica e nello Pseudo Dionigi Areopagita," *Adamantius* 14 (2008): 320.

37. De Vogel, "Greek Cosmic Love," 71.

38. Perl, *Theophany*, 126n35.

39. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.11, 708B.

participated and unparticipated terms, between the One and the henads. It was therefore quite difficult for Proclus to ascribe a providential love to the One. On the other hand, he ascribes it to inferior gods, and in his commentary on the *Timaeus* he criticizes Christians for not believing in gods proceeding from the First Principle, namely gods who act providentially: "Thus, all religions and sects acknowledge that there is a first principle of things, and all men invoke God as their helper; but all do not believe that there are Gods posterior to this principle, and that a providential energy proceeds from them into the universe."[40] Proclus obviously felt a certain aversion toward the Christian attitude of ascribing providence to the First Principle, that is, God; and this could help in reflecting upon the reasons why the Athenian scholarch talks about providential love only on the level of inferior gods.[41]

The idea of different kinds of love, together with love's relationship to Good and Beautiful, is underlined by Dionysius, as seen in the previously quoted passage, and also in a successive one:

> What is signified [by "love" and "yearning"] is a capacity to effect a unity, an alliance, and a particular commingling in the Beautiful and the Good. It is a capacity which preexists through the Beautiful and the Good. It is dealt out from the Beautiful and the Good through the Beautiful and the Good. It binds the things of the same order in a mutually regarding union. It moves superior to provide for subordinate, and it stirs the subordinate in a return toward the superior.[42]

The idea of Good as Love was not strange to Plotinus, as he also identified Good as Eros. Nonetheless, the free and unselfish giving of goodness is attributed to the Good, rather than to the Good as Eros. Moreover, Eros is not productive of good, or procreative, so "the Good as Eros creates, but the power of creating *per se* is not attributed to Eros."[43]

The love of God who cares and provides for his products is expressed by Dionysius as ἔρως ἐκστατικός: "This divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved. This is shown in the providence lavished by the superior on the subordinate. It is shown in the regard for one another demonstrated by those of equal status. And it is

40. Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, vol. 1, ed. Ernst Diehl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903), 286DE. See Henri-Dominique Saffrey, "Allusions anti-chrétiennes chez Proclus, le diadoque platonicien," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 59 (1975): 558–59.

41. Cf. Podolak, "L'amore divino," 321.

42. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.12, 709D.

43. Esposito Buckley, "Ecstatic and Emanating," 44–45.

shown by the subordinate in their divine return toward what is higher."[44] Again ἔρως ἐπιστρεπτικός and ἔρως προνοητικός appear together in the same image of love. This time, however, they are all characterized as ecstasy, as ἔρως ἐκστατικός, which is a genuinely Dionysian innovation, and "it would seem merely perverse to deny that Dionysius's Christianity is the direct cause of this adaptation."[45] The ecstatic power of love makes beings go out of themselves as providence (πρόνοια) of the superior, cohesion (συνοχή) of the equals, and return (ἐπιστροφή) of inferiors to superiors. Dionysius finds the basis of this ecstatic love in the Scriptures, in St Paul's words "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Paul, "swept along by his yearning for God and seized of its ecstatic power," was, for Dionysius, "truly a lover … possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned, as exceptionally beloved."[46] So Paul becomes the example of love, in his case of the ἔρως ἐπιστρεπτικός, since he goes out of himself to reach God and to be possessed by him, to belong not to himself but to the beloved.[47] However, this is not the only movement of love—as man goes out of himself for God, so God goes out of himself for man, seeking the other.[48] As with every relationship of love, so too this love has a twofold character—for one to be able to give, the other must be able to receive love. This is why God also goes out of himself in the direction of man, just as man goes out of himself in the direction of God, until the two finally meet and touch, so that one lives in the other. And therefore the Areopagite continues:

> And, in truth, it must be said too that the very cause of the universe in the beautiful, good superabundance of his benign yearning for all is also carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything. He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself.[49]

In this passage Dionysius employs a characteristically erotic vocabulary, as if he were talking about two lovers, who are beguiled by love and desire, and enticed away from their dwelling, in an attempt to satisfy their burning love for each other. However, these words applied to God do not have

44. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.13, 712A.
45. Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape," 239. Cf. Podolak, "Il divino amore," 323–25.
46. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.13, 712A.
47. See Andia, *Henosis*, 151.
48. See De Vogel, "Greek Cosmic Love," 70.
49. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.13, 712AB.

the same connotation, or at least they are not completely the same. If one interprets this passage in analogy to human love, then the ancient notion of eros as need or lack would come to light. But God cannot in any way be in need of something, and he lacks nothing. The Areopagite is fully aware of this, which is why he safeguards the completeness of God by saying that he goes out of his dwelling place and abides within all things, though "he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity" which allows him to "remain, nevertheless, within himself," and to be "intrinsically ecstatic."[50] Consequently, God goes out of himself, but at the same time he remains within himself. This is a secret of divine love, a mystery by which God goes out of himself by remaining within himself, and by which he loves his creations but is not in need of anything. God's ecstasy is, in fact, according to Golitzin, a bold innovation of Dionysius—pagan philosophers did not use *ecstasis* to describe God's action, and by doing it, the Areopagite accentuates both God's transcendence and his own action to create through a kind of self-transcendence.[51] This is possible because of his superessential capacity (power, δύναμις) and because of the fact that he is not a thing, not a being, but he is always "all in all."

God still demonstrates a sort of jealousy:

> That is why those possessed of spiritual insight describe him as "zealous" because his good yearning for all things is so great and because he stirs in men a deep yearning desire for zeal. In this way he proves himself to be zealous because zeal is always felt for what is desired and because he is zealous for the creatures for whom he provides. In short, both the yearning and the object of that yearning belong to the Beautiful and the Good. They preexist in it, and because of it they exist and come to be.[52]

This jealousy is not, however, a jealousy directed toward something that God lacks or needs. God's eros, as already mentioned, is not the result of any need; on the contrary, he is jealous because of his providential love, because of his care for his creations, which he draws to himself.[53] In addition, both love and the object of love are found in the beautiful and the good, and so the being's love for God coincides with God's love for the being, meaning that the being's return to God coincides with God's drawing of

50. Cf. Perl, *Theophany*, 46.

51. See Alexander Golitzin, *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2013), 63–64.

52. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.13, 712B.

53. Cf. Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, 194.

the being to himself, while God's giving to the being coincides with the being's self-giving to God. That is how not only Paul, but also every being, can and should claim that it is no longer they who live, but it is God who lives in them.[54] Dionysius does not miss the chance to develop this concurrence further:

> Why is it, however, that theologians sometimes refer to God as Yearning and Love and sometimes as the yearned-for and the Beloved? On the one hand he causes, produces, and generates what is being referred to, and, on the other hand, he is the thing itself. He is stirred by it and he stirs it. He is moved to it and he moves it. So they call him the beloved and the yearned-for since he is beautiful and good, and, again, they call him yearning and love because he is the power [δύναμις] moving and lifting all things up to himself, for in the end what is he if not Beauty and Goodness, the One who of himself reveals [ἔκφανσις] himself, the good procession [πρόοδος] of his own transcendent unity? He is yearning on the move [ἐρωτική κίνησις], simple, self-moved, self-acting, preexistent in the Good, flowing out from the Good onto all that is, and returning once again to the Good.[55]

God is therefore described here both as God in se and ad extra,[56] not only as the object of love and yearning, but also as "the thing itself"—as power (δύναμις), manifestation (ἔκφανσις), and procession (πρόοδος). He is also a movement,[57] which constitutes the eternal and endless circle of love: "In this divine yearning shows especially its unbeginning and unending nature traveling in an endless circle through the Good, from the Good, in the Good, and to the Good, unerringly turning, ever on the same center, ever in the same direction, always proceeding, always remaining, always being restored to itself."[58]

The eternal circle is, then, love as both procession and return; it is God who is present in all things and who gives them their goodness, beauty, power, and being. Love is thus identified as power, manifestation, procession, and erotic movement which preexists in the Good, goes out of the Good, and circularly moves therefrom toward beings, and then, in rever-

54. See Perl, *Theophany*, 48. It should be noted, however, that this does not mean that the soul has an innate eros for the Good, as is the case in Plotinus, but since the soul is created in the image and likeness of God, it does not automatically follow that the soul's return to God is ontologically ensured (see Esposito Buckley, "Ecstatic and Emanating," 58). We shall return to this point later.

55. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.14, 712C.

56. See Golitzin, *Mystagogy*, 92.

57. Similar ideas are found in Gregory Nazianzen, who was "the first theologian to understand the idea of movement as a divine attribute." Sigurd Bergmann, *Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 115.

58. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.14, 712D–713A.

sion, returns to the Good. As Dionysius claims, all of this was set out by his great teacher, Hierotheus, in his *Hymns of Eros*. Hierotheus, according to the Areopagite, describes love as follows: "When we talk of yearning, whether this be in God or an angel, in the mind or in the spirit or in nature, we should think of a unifying and co-mingling power which moves the superior to provide for the subordinate, peer to be in communion with peer, and subordinate to return to the superior and the outstanding."[59]

Hierotheus distinguishes between five appearances of love: divine (εἴτε θεῖον), angelic (εἴτε αγγελικὸν), intellectual (εἴτε νοερὸν), spiritual (εἴτε ψυχικὸν), and natural (εἴτε φυσικὸν), which are articulated through the three movements mentioned already: the providential movement of superior toward the subordinate, the movement of communion between equals, and the movement of return of the subordinate toward the superior. In the following passages, Hierotheus orders multiple yearnings according to procession from the One to the concentration of all the yearnings into a single entity. As the movement of love is circular, so it begins and it ends in singular:

> I have set out in due order the many yearnings springing from the One and I have explained the nature of the knowledge and power appropriate to the yearnings within the world and beyond. These are surpassed, according to the clear intention of the argument, by the orders and ranks of the intelligent and intelligible yearnings. After them are found the most truly beautiful yearnings which are self-intelligible and divine and which quite rightly are praised by us. But now, once more, let me take all of these yearnings and concentrate them into the single yearning which is the father of all yearnings. First let me divide in two their general powers as yearnings. The irrepressible cause of all yearning has command and primacy over them and is the cause beyond them all and indeed is the goal toward which everything everywhere strives upward, each as best it can.[60]

Consequently, different types of love are divided as follows: 1) those coming from the world; 2) those which are superior to the world; 3) intelligent and intelligible loves; and finally 4) the most truly beautiful loves. Andia identified the source with such a disposition in the hierarchy of henads in Proclus's *Elements of Theology*: 1) Τὸ Ἕν; 2) ἑνάδες νοηταί; 3) ἑνάδες νοεραί; 4) ἑνάδες ὑπερκόσμιοι (ψυχή), and 5) ἑνάδες ἐγκόσμιοι.[61] All these types of love are concentrated in the single love, their father, but this single love,

59. Ibid., IV.15, 713AB.
60. Ibid., IV.16, 713BC.
61. See Andia, *Henosis*, 154; Proclus, *Elementa theologiae*, prop. 162–65.

again, should be distinguished from the total love (ὁ ὁλικὸς ἔρως) which proceeds from all beings, precisely, as Andia warns, because of the origin of their procession—the divine love proceeds "through the Good, from the Good, in the Good, and to the Good"[62] in a circular movement, while total love proceeds from all beings toward the absolute Cause of all love.[63] However, Hierotheus's goal is to gather these in unity, in order to conclude that "there is a simple self-moving power directing all things to mingle as one, that it starts out from the Good, reaches down to the lowliest creation, returns then in due order through all stages back to the Good, and thus turns from itself and through itself and upon itself and toward itself in an everlasting circle."[64] So, at the end of his treatment of eros, Dionysius defines it as a simple self-moving power,[65] which progresses in an endless circle, thus expressing again the concept of procession and return, acting in order to put all things into union: through the love of the superior for inferiors, of inferiors for superiors, and of equals among themselves, one simple power of eros comes to light, and as it unifies different types of love, so it brings all things into union with each other and with God as the final end of their movement, because "he is the goal of all yearning and because it lays a yoke on all who wish it, the sweet toil of that holy, omnipotent, and indestructible yearning for his goodness."[66]

It is clear that Dionysius's concept of eros is creative and productive in nature. This, in combination with the frequent use of terms such as "excess," "overflow," or "superabundance" (ὑπερβολή) raises the question regarding the very character of creating, in the sense of freedom or necessity. Since God loves all and is love, and since this love moves to the giving of itself, the question is whether this affects God's own will, that is, does the superabundance of love, which must give itself, somehow limit God's freedom? Although this distinction between freedom (or will) and necessity is often over-simplified and misconceived,[67] some thought should be given to the issue.

62. Cf. Rom 11:36: "All things are from him and through Him and for him."

63. See Andia, *Henosis*, 155.

64. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.17, 713D.

65. Note the correlation between the Christian proclamation that God is love and Plato's idea of gods as self-moved movers, as expressed in book X of his *Laws*, as opposed to the Aristotelian notion of god as unmoved mover, which he elaborates in the book XII of *Metaphysics*.

66. *De divinis nominibus*, X.2, 937A.

67. Cf. Illtyd Threthowan, "Irrationality in Theology and the Palamite Distinction," *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977): 21; Perl, *Theophany*, 49; Alexander Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita with Special Reference to Its Predecessors in Eastern Christian Tradition* (Thessalonica: PIPM, 1994), 82–83.

Generally, the misconception of freedom or necessity, when it comes to creation, comes from the often too anthropomorphic understanding of God, in the sense of putting alternatives before God, one of which he has to choose: "God's plan for creation is what it is because he is who he is. This is freedom in the fullest, most positive sense where it coincides with necessity in the fullest, most positive sense."[68] This is fairly true, since Dionysius himself would be against our application of the human distinctions to God, but it can hardly suffice for our need to understand certain issues, one of which is determining whether there can be something by which God is limited or forced to do one thing rather than another. Perl argues that the misconception goes back to Neoplatonists, and some unreliable interpretations of emanations, that is, of creation by the One. Although Plotinus does indeed talk about necessity in terms of creation, this does not however mean that there is some higher universal law to which all beings, including the One, are subject. This is simply because the One is not a being, not even the highest being, and so it cannot be subordinate to a "law of emanation," but rather "as Giving or Production, is itself the law or paradigm to which all things, in producing, conform." As such, the One would be the power of all things, and therefore absolutely unconditioned.[69] As a result, Perl concludes, tension between "Neoplatonic necessary procession" and "Christian free creation" is a misconception; and so it would be wrong to put Dionysius in either of these two categories.[70] In this sense God would be nothing but the making of all things, and so God cannot not create: "That yearning which creates all the goodness of the world preexisted superabundantly within the Good and did not allow it to remain without issue."[71] From the utterance "did not allow," Perl concludes that there can be no alternatives, and that God "cannot not produce," although this "cannot" is within himself.[72] However, one could argue that this "did not allow" is precisely a testimony of certain choice, since if something is allowed or not allowed, than there has to be an alternative—if something is not allowed to be done, then it follows that it *could* be done, but it is not allowed; otherwise, there would be no sense in speaking of permitting or not permitting something. If something is the only possible thing, then it simply must happen, it must be done, and so allowing it or forbidding it would be absurd:

68. Threthowan, "Irrationality in Theology," 21.
69. Perl, *Theophany*, 50.
70. Ibid., 51.
71. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.10, 708B.
72. Perl, *Theophany*, 52.

In Christian belief we understand the world as that which might not have been, and correlatively we understand God as capable of existing, in undiminished goodness and greatness, even if the world had not been. We know that there is a world, so we appreciate the world as in fact created, but we acknowledge that it is meaningful to say that God could have been all that there is. Such a "solitary" existence of God is a counter factual, but it is meaningful, whereas it would not be meaningful for the pagan sense of the divine.[73]

On the other hand, it would not be correct to speak about alternatives before (or in) God, since there is nothing higher than (or equal to) God, which can present alternatives before him, from amongst which he would have to choose. There is nothing that can compel God to do or not to do something, and nor can there be some sort of internal struggle within God. The "did not allow" sentence is, therefore, not be understood in the sense of alternatives (whether their presence or their absence), but in the sense, so to say, of the rhetorical,[74] which means that God acts in accordance with his nature, he bounds himself (freely) by goodness, love, justice, because he wants it so. But it would be wrong to say that God cannot do otherwise: "House of Israel, can't I deal with you like this potter, declares the Lord? Like clay in the potter's hand, so are you in mine, house of Israel!" (Jer 18:6). He obviously could do harm, and could destroy just as he created, but he wills good, and therefore acts good.

The matter in question also implies the issue of God's omnipotence—if God is omnipotent, then he can do anything, but he can also do nothing; he can create, but he can also not create: "He can do whatever he wants" (Ps 115:3). If one relies only on the superabundance in God, which implies that creation happens out of excess or overflow, then one could be led to another misunderstanding. God does not create simply because he is superabundant (in love, or essence—it does not matter), as if he were unable to contain all that excess, so he pours it out through creation, but he creates out of love, which is the keyword in the entire question. He is not some transcendent image of Nietzsche's nobleman who gives because of the overflow of his richness, or from an impulse of the superabundant

73. Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 19.

74. Cf., for example, *De divinis nominibus*, X.1, 937A: "He generates everything from out of himself as from some omnipotent root and he returns all things back to himself as though to some omnipotent storehouse. Being their omnipotent foundation, he holds them all together. He keeps them thus in a transcendent bond and he *does not permit* them either to fall away from him or to be destroyed by being moved from their perfect home."

power.[75] On the contrary, he creates and he gives himself out of love; and is it not that every act of love is an act of freedom, just as every act of giving is free, as otherwise it would not be love and it would not be a gift? Freedom does not always include love, but love always presupposes freedom.

In this regard, I am not prepared to agree with Torstein Tollefsen's view that Dionysius did not adopt or develop the Christian doctrine on divine freedom.[76] In his philosophical consistency and academic honesty, Tollefsen himself presents three possible objections to his own conclusions, although he does not see them as sufficient to undermine his views. These objections refer to the fact that Dionysius explicitly affirms human freedom,[77] which would also imply the freedom of God, while secondly, in one place, Dionysius claims that "without the One there is no multiplicity, but there can still be the One where there is no multiplicity."[78] Finally, we should consider the fact that Maximus the Confessor, a great Orthodox thinker and careful follower of Dionysius, does not express any critique toward the Areopagite, which could serve as "proof" of his Orthodoxy. In my opinion, the first two objections are already sufficient to "justify" Dionysius: the fact that he does not develop a discussion on this issue does not mean his refusal to accept the doctrine on God's freedom, and I do not think that *argumentum ex silentio* can be valid here. Dionysius wrote his works with a clear idea on the topics of discussion, on each work's disposition, as well as on the intention of his writings and their audience. It is not, therefore, acceptable to expect him to write any more or any less of what he did write. If one cannot find a developed and detailed treatment of a certain controversial issue, that does not justify classifying Dionysius in the heterodox or heretic party, but simply implies that a certain topic is not of his interest, whether in the overall plan of the work or perhaps in the attempt to safeguard his pseudonym. Furthermore, the *Corpus* contains many places where the author affirms the freedom of both God and creation. Besides the passages cited by Tollefsen, it might be useful to cite a locus where the Areopagite says that God is "free of every limitation, beyond

75. See Nietzsche, *Beyond God and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), frg. 260: "There is the feeling of plenitude, of power, which seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of a wealth which would give and bestow: the noble man also helps the unfortunate, but not out of pity, but rather from an impulse generated by the super-abundance of power."

76. See Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 111–13.

77. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, in Luibheid, *Complete Works*, IX.3, 260CD. Hereafter, *De coelesti hierarchia*.

78. *De divinis nominibus*, XIII.2, 980A.

every limitation,"[79] or where he claims that the names Time, Days, Season, and Eternity "refer to someone totally free of change or movement . . . , someone who is the cause of eternity, of time and the days."[80] Dionysius also says that "intelligent beings, because of their free will, can fall away from the light of the mind,"[81] while speaking of hierarchs he writes that the hierarch prays to God "only for what is suitable to the divine promises, for what pleases God, and for what God will freely give."[82] All this indicates that Dionysius did accept freedom as characteristic to both God and human beings, and in this matter he does not fall away from the Christian doctrine, although in his works this doctrine is found in a quite incomplete and fragmentary form.

Besides, as Golitzin has pointed out, Dionysius does make a certain distinction between will and nature, between God's essence and "powers"; and he places creation exactly in the latter category, as God in relation is God in his πρόοδοι.[83] Golitzin also shows how in the *Corpus*, "God's will or willing is in every case clearly associated with his goodness, that is, his love acting on and for his creation."[84] So the point regarding God's omnipotence, his goodness, and his love is that God can do everything, but does what he wills—and he wills only good. This, however, does not mean, as pointed out above, that God stands before two (or more) possible alternatives, from amongst which he has to choose one. He is good, and he provides for things capable of partaking of his goodness; he is loving, and so he loves all his creatures. But this does not happen because God *must* act like that, or that he is forced to do one thing and not the other—it simply means that he *need not* deliberate over or choose an activity that is fully in accordance with his nature and will.[85] It is in this sense that the exaggeration of tension between freedom and necessity should be understood. Or, by applying his own Dionysian method of apophatic and cataphatic theologies, by which every name is applied to God but yet he is none of them, one could say that God is Freedom, but then also that God is not Freedom, and therefore God is *beyond* Freedom; alternatively, that God is

79. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, in Luibheid, *Complete Works*, V, 1048B. Hereafter, *De mystica theologia*.

80. *De divinis nominibus*, X.2, 937B.

81. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, in Luibheid, *Complete Works*, II.3.3, 400A. Hereafter, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*.

82. Ibid., VII.3.7, 564B.

83. See Golitzin, *Et Itroibo*, 83.

84. Ibid.

85. See Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, 196.

Necessity, but again that God is not Necessity, so God is *beyond* Necessity. The point is that the discourse on freedom, necessity, choice, deliberation, etc., is based on our human conceptions, and is not applicable to God in absolute and definite terms; simply, he is beyond such discourse.[86]

Whilst I am aware that I could also be accused of being anthropomorphic in my argument, which I denounced earlier as improper when speaking of God, I still however think that these considerations could help toward our own clearer human understanding of the issue that interests us, since these are the questions posed by our reason, by our own rational nature, which provoke rational thinking and discourse, though they might not be appropriate for a genuine theological discourse on God, who is ineffable and rationally incomprehensible. In this regard, it seems advisable to open the floor to Dionysius once again:

> This is something which was marvelously grasped by that truly divine man, my teacher and yours and the light of our common instructor. For this is what he said: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men." Those words are true not only because all human thinking is a sort of error when compared with the solid permanence of the perfect divine thoughts but also because it is customary for theologians to apply negative terms to God, but contrary to the usual sense of a deprivation. Scripture, for example, calls the all-apparent light "invisible." It says regarding the One of many praises and many names that he is ineffable and nameless. It says of the One who is present in all things and who may be discovered from all things that he is ungraspable and "inscrutable." And here the divine apostle is said to be praising God for his "foolishness," which in itself seems absurd and strange, but uplifts [us] to the ineffable truth which is there before all reasoning.[87]

Clearly Dionysius here expresses his apophatic stance regarding the nature of God, which is ungraspable and inaccessible. In these terms, even God's foolishness is greater than human wisdom, which testifies that God, though all-present in everything, is at the same time absolutely transcendent, and the real truth about him cannot be expressed as it lies far beyond reason and discourse.

86. See an interesting discussion on different forms of divine freedom, and attribution of "freedom of indifference" to God in Katherin A. Rogers, "Anselm on God's Perfect Freedom," *Saint Anselm Journal* 1, no. 1 (2003): 1–8; and Kevin M. Staley, "God's Personal Freedom: A Response to Katherin Rogers," *Saint Anselm Journal* 1, no. 1 (2003): 9–16.

87. *De divinis nominibus*, VII.1, 865BC.

Love in the Hierarchies

The purpose of the hierarchy is assimilation to God as far as possible. It is a sacred order, knowledge, and activity.[88] These are, however, instituted in love, by love, and for love, so Dionysius can say that "the common goal of every hierarchy consists of the continuous love of God, and of things divine, a love which is sacredly worked out in an inspired and unique way, and before this, the complete and unswerving avoidance of everything contrary to it."[89] This love is present in both celestial and human hierarchies. The hierarchies, in fact, are an acknowledgment of God's love for humanity and a vehicle for humanity's deification. Within the hierarchy the mystery of Incarnation is proclaimed and grasped as the ultimate result of the divine philanthropy whose goal was to fulfil God's plan of deification: "The hierarch … proclaims the good news to all that God out of his own natural goodness is merciful to the inhabitants of earth, that because of his love for humanity he has deigned to come down to us and that, like a fire, he has made one with himself all those capable of being divinized."[90]

As an expression of God's love the hierarchy transmits knowledge and sacramental activity with the goal of uplifting human beings into the union with the divine.[91] The divine philanthropy, then, shows a loving relationship between incarnation and deification, because out of philanthropy God became man, in order to enable humankind to be deified, which is a gift granted by divine grace: the Deity is called "loving toward humanity, because in one of its persons it accepted a true share of what it is we are, and thereby issued a call to man's lowly state to rise up to it."[92] The term φιλανθρωπία denotes a specific divine love for humanity, and Dionysius always reserves it for the occasions in which he discusses the incarnation.[93] Although the issue of incarnation is perhaps not central to the *Corpus*, its occurrences nevertheless show that Dionysius sees it as the basis for deification—philanthropy in the context of incarnation applies to God's saving work, the institution of the hierarchies, a stimulus for the creation on its return to the Cause,[94] and the Deity's choice to reveal itself to the world.[95]

88. See *De coelesti hierarchia*, III.1, 164D.
89. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.3, 376A. Note that Dionysius here uses the term ἀγάπη.
90. Ibid., II.2.1, 393A.
91. See *De coelesti hierarchia*, IV.4, 181B; VII.3, 209B.
92. *De divinis nominibus*, I.4, 592A.
93. See *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.3.13, 444C; Dionysius, *Epistula* IV, 1072B.
94. See ibid., III.3.4, 429B.
95. See ibid., III.3.3, 429A.

The importance of the hierarchy to this process is testified in both its institution and constitution, in that the ordered arrangement of the hierarchy must not be disturbed, as this would violate the divine philanthropy. Dionysius shows this clearly in condemning the monk Demophilus for having reproached a priest and thus violated the hierarchical order: "I would have never believed that Demophilus could have so little awareness of God's goodness and of his love for humanity, that he could forget how much he himself needed a merciful savior, that he could take it upon himself to reject the priests."[96] We shall return later to the importance of the hierarchies, but for now let us note the character of the hierarchy as a theophany and an expression of God's philanthropy, attested in the very arrangement of the hierarchies that must not be disturbed.

Eros, according to Dionysius, is known to have certain connotations of violence or irrational, bestial passion. However, this does not prevent him from fully exploiting the positive aspects of the term, and further he ascribes a positive quality to these violent and irrational qualities when applied to angelic passions. He is clear that these should be understood differently in "those lacking in reason" and in "intelligent beings." In fact, for the former, "it is a limitless appetite for the material, a thrust originating in that chronic urge to dwell with the ephemeral, that living, mastering longing to remain with whatever is applauded by the senses."[97] Conversely, when it comes to intelligent beings, one must apply dissimilar similarities to them, and conclude that they experience desire, but "as a divine yearning for that immaterial reality which is beyond all reason and all intelligence."[98] The characteristics of intelligent beings' love are the same as those of human love—circular, ecstatic, and unifying:[99] "It is a strong and sure desire for the clear and impassible contemplation of the transcendent. It is a hunger for an unending, conceptual, and true communion with the spotless and sublime light, of clear and splendid beauty. Intemperance then will be an unfailing and unturning power, seen in the pure and unchanging yearning for divine beauty and in the total commitment to the real object of all desire."[100]

The life of intelligent beings is a life of total intelligence, and they nat-

96. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Letters*, in Luibheid, *Complete Works*, *Epistula* VIII.4, 1096A. Hereafter, *Epistula*.

97. *De coelesti hierarchia*, II.4, 141D–144A.

98. Ibid., II.4, 144A.

99. See Andia, *Henosis*, 162.

100. *De coelesti hierarchia*, II.4, 144A.

urally enter "a more generous communion with the Deity, because they are forever marching toward the heights, because, as permitted, they are drawn to a concentration of an unfailing love for God, because they immaterially receive undiluted the original enlightenment."[101] Those closest to God are at the same time those most affected, most inflamed, by divine love, and so they designate a perennial circling around divine things and the penetrating warmth whose image they have the power to stamp on their subordinate. Furthermore, they also have the power to purify and to keep unveiled and undiminished the illumination they give out.[102] Since they are supremely pure, their order is "eternally self-moved according to an immutable love for God."[103] Their love is full and perfect, and their knowledge complete, and so "their yearning for God never fails."[104]

This angelic love is an example of our own human love. Man is to be cleaned of love for the material and ephemeral, and then to turn himself to the love of the immaterial. In order to achieve this aim, man must be open to the workings of God and clear an uplifting path, of which the first step is illumination—the divine birth, the divine beginning in which the love of God moves us toward the divine.[105] Of course, this divine birth has to be freely asked by an initiate, while the one who asks is "fired by love of transcendent reality and longing for a sacred share of it."[106]

The love for God also gives certain rights, or better permissions, about which we find out in Dionysius's account of the rite of synaxis. During this rite there is a gradual dismissal of different ranks of the sacred people. The first ones to be barred from the nave of the church are those who are not initiated, and then those who have abandoned a sacred way of life. After them, the next to be barred are those who "submit to opposing fears and fantasies," followed by those who have abandoned the opposing life but who "have not yet acquired as something permanent the undiluted yearning for God."[107] The same idea recurs when Dionysius explains how consecrating invocations, that is, prayers at ordination and tonsure, are not to be disclosed to the public or revealed in writing. In order to grasp their meaning one "must be perfected in a more holy and uplifting mode of life

101. Ibid., IV.2, 180A.

102. See ibid., VII.1, 205C; Cf. ibid., XV.2, 328C–329A; Denys Rutledge, *Cosmic Theology: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Denys* (New York: Alba House, 1964), 61.

103. *De coelesti hierarchia*, VII. 2, 208B.

104. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, IV.3.5, 480C.

105. See ibid., II.1, 392B.

106. Ibid., II.2.2, 393B.

107. Ibid., III.3.7, 436B.

by love for God [ἀναγωγὴν ἔρωτι θείῳ] and by sacred activities."[108] These sacred activities have their source in God himself who uplifts the initiate to the understanding of the invocations.[109]

In the different ranks of laity, members of the intermediate order, namely those who have been purified and who are given to the priests for illumination, contemplate certain sacred things, and commune with divine symbols in proportion to their ability; again, to the extent of their abilities, "they rise up to the divine love of what they understand."[110] The highest order of the laity, the monks, live a specific kind of life which "enables them to achieve a singular mode of life conforming to God and open to the perfection of God's love."[111]

The hierarchies are, in fact, nothing other than an expression of God's love, since it is through them that the erotic movements happen—through ecclesiastical and celestial hierarchies superiors provide for inferiors, equals are in communion with one another, and inferiors are stirred to return to the superior. Thus, Esposito Buckley notes:

> God's descending Eros both inspires the soul to return to God, and provides this hierarchical system of providential care and divine illumination which makes the soul's divine assimilation and return to God possible. The soul, for its part, is uplifted to the fullness of its own, unique relationship with God only to the extent that the soul remains open and receptive to the purifying, illuminating, and perfecting, as well as the unifying and, ultimately, deifying power of this divine Eros.[112]

This unifying and deifying power of Eros is manifested and revealed even in the present life, according to the Areopagite's idea that the visible is the plain image of the invisible. In this sense we can have a taste of the future age and perceive a glimpse into this deified state which will be complete in the age to come:

> Indeed we see some already united here and now with God, for they are the lovers of truth and have abandoned the passion for material goods. They are completely free from all evils and are stirred by a divine longing for all good things. They love peace and holiness. In this life they look forward to the coming life. Free of all passion they live like angels among men. They praise the divine name ceaselessly. They practice goodness and every other virtue.[113]

108. Ibid., VII.3.10, 565C.
109. See ibid.
110. Ibid., VI.1.2, 532C.
111. Ibid., VI.1.3, 533A.
112. Esposito Buckley, "Ecstatic and Emanating," 60.
113. Dionysius, *Epistula* X, 1117B.

This eirenic, or even idyllic, portrayal of those already united with the divine plainly shows Dionysius's belief that it is possible to "live like angels among men" and it also serves as an example and model of human life and behavior. The motif of the present union with God clearly has a contemplative component, but it also demonstrates a strong ethical dimension, which transpires through the virtuous life, detachment from earthly material things, and a peace-loving attitude. The Areopagite strengthens this picture even more by putting it into a letter to no less than the Apostle John, exiled on the island of Patmos, whom he obviously praises as a concrete example of achieved union with God. The character of this union is such that no earthly challenge or pain can distract or disturb the mind, and so Dionysius clearly proclaims: "I would not be so foolish as to imagine that you suffer in any way."[114]

The union is of the utmost importance to Dionysius, and as we have seen, this effect is brought about by love. The Areopagite's theory of love bears several hallmarks that should be noted briefly. First, he equates eros to agape, which not only shows his closeness to the philosophical traditions, but also allows him to stress the manifold character of love in terms of its intellectual, generative, and practical or active dimensions. He describes it as an attractive and giving power, by which God creates and descends into creation, while on the other hand, creation returns to God by the same loving power. Moreover, the character of this love is ecstatic, which means that both God and human beings go out of themselves in the ultimate expression of their love for each other, thus belonging not to themselves but to the beloved. Such love is present not only in the relationship between God and human beings, but also in the hierarchies, where it gains its value through providential, communal, and revertive types of love. In addition, Dionysius also employs the term φιλανθρωπία and puts it in the specific context of incarnation and providence.[115] Thus, love transpires through the hierarchically arranged cosmos, and plays an active and crucial role in achieving the creature's union with God, operated through intellectual, ethical, and sacramental activities. The union, however, is not a solitary quest; rather, it is a loving cooperation with other beings, and chiefly with Christ who presides over all hierarchy, sanctification, and power. "With that yearning for beauty which raises us upward to him, he pulls

114. Ibid.

115. See, for example, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.3.11, 441A: "Yet the goodness of the Deity has endless love for humanity and never ceased from benignly pouring out on us its providential gifts."

together all our many differences," and "makes our life, disposition, and activity something one and divine."[116] This love for beauty as the uplifting and unifying power brings us to the theme that we shall explore in the following chapter.

116. Ibid., I.1, 372AB.

CHAPTER TWO BEAUTY

Beauty as a Divine Name

In the structure of names attributed to the Godhead, beauty plays an important role. It appears already in the first chapter of *The Divine Names*, where Dionysius explains how God is called by different names, such as henad, Trinity, Cause, beauty, etc. So, the Cause of beings "is hailed as wise and beautiful [σοφὴν δὲ καὶ καλὴν] because beings which keep their nature uncorrupted are filled with divine harmony and sacred beauty [εὐπρεπείας]."[1] God is therefore called beautiful because of the beauty in beings, which means that the Cause is named by the attributes of things caused. Since every name can be applied to the Deity, it is then appropriate to attribute to it the characteristics of things that Deity itself created—it is through the effects that the cause is known. The Areopagite clarifies that by saying that the "wise writers, when praising the Cause of everything that is, use names drawn from all things caused: good [ὡς ἀγαθόν], beautiful [ὡς καλόν], wise [ὡς σοφόν] …"[2] The Cause, therefore, is correctly named in accordance with its effects.

1. *De divinis nominibus* I.4, 592A. Dionysius uses here the word εὐπρέπεια, which means comeliness, or attractiveness, but also beauty. He always uses this term when he thinks of beauty as applied to God in his relation to the cosmos, the world, and angelic and human hierarchies. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry S. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 728, indicates several ancient authors using the term, among others Thucydides, and Plato in the *Euthydemus*, but none of them uses the word as Dionysius does. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 574, points to the early Christian work *The Shepherd of Hermas*, I.3.4, where the same term appears: "Lo, the God of powers, who by His invisible strong power and great wisdom has created the world, and by His glorious counsel has surrounded His creation with beauty [εὐπρέπειαν] …" Obviously εὐπρέπεια is given here the same meaning that Dionysius applies to it, so it would not be wrong to think that this work could be one of his sources for such use of the term.

2. *De divinis nominibus*, I.6, 596B.

All the names applied to the Deity should be understood as the names of the entire Godhead. This means that although God is Unity and Trinity at the same time, all of the names apply to all three persons of the Trinity: "And when it comes to the rule of the entire Deity over all the world, concerning the Fatherhood or the Sonship within God, how often is the term 'Lord' used by Scripture in regard to both the Father and the Son? The Spirit is too 'Lord.' So also with 'beauty' and 'wisdom,' which are ascribed to the divinity in its totality."[3] As the Areopagite explains, there are three types of names which are applied to God. The first group consists of names which reflect the denial in the sense of superabundance, such as "the transcendently good, the transcendently divine, the transcendently existing,"[4] etc. The second group concerns the names which have a causal sense, while the third one contains names that express distinctions, and are proper to the Father, to the Son, and to the Spirit. Beauty is among those names which fall in the second group, together with good, existent, life-giving, and so on; and these "are ascribed to the Cause of all good things because of all the good gifts it has dispensed."[5]

Furthermore, Dionysius makes no distinction between beauty as participated in and beauty as participating. This means that beauty in creation reflects the beauty upon which it was created; and since God is the cause of all perfections of things, he is named from all creatures.[6] Therefore, in a terminological sense, the same name (beauty) is applied to both participated and participating. To be exact, Dionysius does make a difference between μετοχή and μετέχον in intelligible beings, and says that "beautiful" is the name for that which participates in beauty, while "beauty" is the name of the ingredient which is the cause of beauty. However, he also warns not to "make distinction between 'beautiful' and 'beauty' as applied to the Cause which gathers all into one."[7] That is why the Areopagite says that the sacred writers call God both beautiful (ὡς καλόν) and beauty (ὡς κάλλος), since these terms will "convey that it is the source of loveliness and is the flowering of grace [εὐπρεπεῖς εἰσι τῆς καλλοποιοῦ καὶ κεχαριτωμένης ὡραιότης θεωνυμίαι]."[8] Here we encounter yet another term employed for beauty—

3. Ibid., II.1, 637B.
4. Ibid., II.3, 640B.
5. Ibid., II.3, 640BC.
6. Cf. Eric D. Perl, "Hierarchy and Participation in Dionysius the Areopagite and Greek Neoplatonism," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1994): 18.
7. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.7, 701C.
8. Ibid.

ὡραιότης, which means "bloom of youth" or "beauty of a man."[9] It may be noticed that Dionysius repeats here virtually what he said about the notion of ἔρως—now he ascribes ὡραιότης to God, together with κάλλος, just as he did with ἔρως and ἀγάπη, again, of course, not without a basis in tradition.

Since in God there can be no division between participation and participant, as in created beings, so both names of beauty apply to him.[10] Caroline Putnam defined Dionysius's concept of beauty as "a state of perfection in which relationships, if there be any, are so unified and well-ordered that a certain radiance results."[11] In giving this definition she relies on a very significant passage:

> We call "beautiful" that which has a share in beauty, and we give the name of "beauty" to that ingredient which is the cause of beauty in everything. But the "beautiful" [καλόν] which is beyond individual being is called "beauty" [κάλλος] because of that beauty [καλλονὴν] bestowed by it on all things each in accordance with what it is. It is given this name because it is the cause of the harmony and splendor in everything, because like a light it flashes onto everything the beauty-causing impartations of its own well-sprang ray. Beauty "calls" [καλοῦν], whence it is called beauty, all things to itself and gathers everything into itself.[12]

Here we see that God is "the cause of the harmony and splendor in everything," and that he calls all things to himself, thus being not just the source, but also the end; he is both ἀρχή and τέλος. He originates the beauty in all beings, he is their beauty, and he, as Beauty, attracts all beings to himself and "gathers everything to itself." Dionysius proceeds then with a description of the character of true and absolute beauty:

> And they name it beautiful since it is the all-beautiful and the beautiful beyond all. It is forever so, unvaryingly, unchangeably so, beautiful but not as something coming to birth and death, to growth or decay, not lovely in one respect while ugly in some other way. It is not beautiful "now" but otherwise "then," beautiful in relation to one thing but not to another. It is not beautiful in one place and not so in another, as though it could be beautiful for some and not for others. Ah no! In itself and by itself it is the uniquely and the eternally beautiful.[13]

9. Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 2036; See also ὡραῖος, in Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1557, meaning "seasonable, beautiful, fair," and appearing in Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and others.

10. See Melanie Bender, *The Dawn of the Invisible: The Reception of the Platonic Doctrine on Beauty in the Christian Middle Ages—Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Nicholas of Cusa* (Münster: MV Wissenschaft, 2010), 119.

11. Putnam, *Beauty*, 15.

12. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.7, 701CD.

13. Ibid., IV.7, 701D–704A.

Apart from the important characteristics of beauty that Dionysius gives here, it is significant, as some have noticed before,[14] to point out the striking similarities with a passage from Plato's *Symposium*:

> When a man has been thus far tutored in the lore of love, passing from view to view of beautiful things, in the right and regular ascent, suddenly he will have revealed to him, as he draws to the close of his dealings in love, a wondrous vision, beautiful in its nature; and this, Socrates, is the final object of all those previous toils. First of all, it is ever-existent and neither comes to be nor perishes, neither waxes nor wanes; next, it is not beautiful in part and in part ugly, nor is it such at such a time and other at another, nor in one respect beautiful and in another ugly, nor so affected by position as to seem beautiful to some and ugly to others. . . . [It exists] ever in singularity of form independent by itself, while all the multitude of beautiful things partake of it in such wise that, though all of them are coming to be and perishing, it grows neither greater nor less, and is affected by nothing.[15]

An interesting observation about Plato's passage is that it tells nothing about beauty in an affirmative, discursive way; quite the contrary, it is "not a particular description or piece of knowledge."[16] In fact, what Diotima's account says is not what beauty is, but what beauty is not (it is not face or hands, it does not perish, it is not beautiful in one way and ugly in another, etc.), so what we learn from it is "a generic account of the nature of formal structure," which shows a concept of beauty that cannot be defined or explained.[17] And that very much reminds us of the apophatic theology on which Dionysius himself is very keen. However similar these passages may be, Beauty is not for Dionysius just an absolute eternal Form; but it is the personal God. It is the Triune God, as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, just as Dionysius himself proclaimed, in a passage quoted earlier, that just as the title "Lord" is applied to all three persons of the Trinity, so it is the same with "beauty" and "wisdom" which are applied to the divinity in its totality.[18] Dionysius repeats this affirmation in the famous hymn to the Trinity, where he praises the Trinity as "higher than any being, any divinity, any goodness" and prays to the Trinity to lead him into the mysteries of God's Word which, "amid the wholly unsensed and unseen, . . . completely fill our sightless minds with treasures beyond beauty."[19] It is clear that here Dio-

14. See, for example, Putnam, *Beauty*, 15–16.

15. Plato, *The Symposium of Plato*, ed. R. G. Bury (Cambridge: Heffer and Sons, 1909), 210E–211B.

16. Ibid., 211A.

17. Drew A. Hyland, *Plato and the Question of Beauty* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2008), 57.

18. See *De divinis nominibus*, II.1, 637B.

19. *De mystica theologia*, I.1, 997AB. Cf. ibid., II, 1025B: "We would be like sculptors who set out

nysius uses the tension between apophatic and cataphatic languages in describing the Trinity. While apophatically God is non-being, non-goodness, non-beauty, cataphatically he is precisely being, goodness, divinity, and beauty. What comes out of this tension is the hyper-language, which results in describing God as ὑπέρ-, so that the Trinity is beyond being, goodness, divinity, and beauty.

God is called beautiful because he is the "superabundant source in itself of the beauty of every beautiful thing." It seems that Dionysius cannot insist enough on God being the Cause, and as Beauty the cause of all beauty in beings, which, for their own part, reflect his beauty in their own way. Beauty, then, is the source (ἀρχή) of all things, "it is the great creating cause which bestirs the world and holds all things in existence by the longing inside them to have beauty."[20] There is, therefore, a specific ἔρως in each being which yearns for beauty, and so beauty is the principle of erotic movement. This longing is in fact what brings all creatures into being, and so God is before us "as Goal, as the Beloved, as the Cause toward which all things move," and it is also "a model to which they conform."[21] In this passage, Dionysius shows God as the creative/efficient cause (ποιητικὸν αἴτιον), as the final cause (τελικὸν αἴτιον), and as the paradigmatic (παραδειγματικὸν) cause.[22] God is the efficient and final cause, he is ἀρχή and τέλος, the source

to carve a statue. They remove every obstacle to the pure view of the hidden image, and simply by this act of clearing aside [ἀφαιρέσεις] they show up the beauty which is hidden"; Proclus, *In Platonis Alcibiadem*, I.64: "among the intelligible and hidden gods it [Love] makes the intelligible Intellect one with the primary and hidden beauty according to a certain mode of life." Similar imagery is found in Plotinus's *Enneads*, I.6.9: "And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labor to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendor of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine." Klitenic-Wear and Dillon have noticed that the difference between Dionysius and Plotinus stands in that Dionysius "urges the catechumen to find God by sloughing away the material of creation, whereas Plotinus urges one to find the divine beauty of the Soul by attending to its imperfections," Sara Klitenic-Wear and John M. Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 125. While this is true for Plotinus, I am not sure that Klitenic-Wear and Dillon have correctly grasped the meaning of Dionysius's "sculpting away" in order to find the hidden beauty—it does not concern (only) the matter of creation, but it refers rather to vision and knowledge, so that when they are "cleared aside" one is led to the point beyond every vision and knowledge. It is a denial of everything, not just matter, but also of vision, knowledge, and all beings, briefly, it is the denial of both sensible and intelligible.

20. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.7, 704A.

21. Ibid.

22. To the standard four Aristotelian causes, the Neoplatonists add two more—the paradigmatic cause and the instrumental cause. Cf. Plato, *Parmenides*, 132D: "but Parmenides, I think the most likely view is, that these ideas exist in nature as patterns, and the other things resemble them and

and the end of all things; he is the source because he is the cause, and "he is their end, for he is the 'for the sake of whom.'"[23] Speaking of God as paradigmatic cause, Dionysius affirms that "he contains beforehand and created everything in a single act,"[24] and "the exemplars of everything preexist as a transcendent unity within It [Cause]." He names exemplars "those principles [λόγοι] which preexist as a unity in God and which produce the essence of things." He continues: "Theology calls them predefining, divine and good acts of will [προορισμοὺς καλεῖ καὶ θεῖα καὶ ἀγαθὰ θελήματα] which determine and create things and in accordance with which the Transcendent One predefined and brought into being everything that is."[25] These *logoi* are the paradigmatic causes contained in God, by which the essence of beings is established, and in accordance with which each being has being and well-being.[26] These are therefore, acts of will, manifestations of God, and not groups of lesser gods, or divine essence.[27]

Going back to three causes, this scheme conforms with the triad μονή/ πρόοδος/ ἐπιστροφή, in which beings proceed from God (the creative cause), to him they return as being attracted by him (final cause), and to him they conform since they were contained in him in a pre-existent way (paradigmatic cause), as they are an image of their cause, and thus each being's beauty is its determination which is identical to its cause and to its end.[28] Thanks to beauty, all harmony, friendship, and community exist,[29] and through it everything is united.

Unlike other beings, in angels, who are pure intelligence, there can be

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are imitations of them; their participation in ideas is assimilation to them, that and nothing else"; Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem*, ed. V. Cousin (Paris: Durand, 1864), 908–9: "Each Form is not only a pattern [παράδειγμα] to sensible objects, but is also the cause of their being. . . . It would be absurd, after all, if the reason-principles in nature were to possess a certain creative power, while the intelligible Forms should be devoid of any causal role in creation. So, then, every divine Form has not only a paradigmatic aspect, but a paternal one as well, and by virtue of its very being is a generative cause of the many particulars." Of course, in Dionysius's case, these are not attributed to Forms, but to God himself. Similar is Plotinus's idea in the *Enneads*, V.8.9: "the intention is to make us feel the lovable beauty of the autotype of the Divine Idea; to admire a representation is to admire the original upon which it was made."

23. *De divinis nominibus*, V.10, 825B.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., V.8, 824C.

26. See Ibid., V.8, 821D. Cf. Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 115–16.

27. Cf. Putnam, *Beauty*, 64–65; Bender, *Dawn of the Invisible*, 130; Vladimir Lossky, "La notion des 'analogies' chez Denys le Pseudo-Aréopagite," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 5 (1931): 285; Spearritt, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 77–84.

28. Cf. Perl, *Theophany*, 44, and 125n26.

29. Although the only common term that both Dionysius and Proclus use is φιλία, it could be of interest to mention Proclus's words: "Such therefore, in short, is divine beauty, the supplier of divine hilarity, familiarity, and friendship" (*Theologia Platonica*, I.24).

no evil. This is because an angel is an image of God, and a manifestation of the hidden light. Furthermore, angels are also mirrors of the whole of divine beauty (ὡραιότης): "He is a mirror, pure, bright, untarnished, unspotted, receiving, if one may say so, the full loveliness of the divine goodness [ὡραιότητα τῆς ἀγαθοτύπου θεοειδείας] and purely enlightening within itself as far as possible the goodness of the silence in the inner sanctuaries. So, then, there is no evil in angels."[30]

But what about matter? Since God as beauty is the cause of everything, then beauty is also the cause of matter. That is why the matter, the body, cannot be evil, because "ugliness and disease are a defect in form and a lack of due order." In fact, the body is not evil, but a lesser beauty. The body depends on beauty, so "if beauty, form, and order could be destroyed completely, the body itself would disappear."[31] This follows logically from the presupposition that God is beauty, and that all beauty in creation derives from him; furthermore, the form (εἶδος) is in fact thought beforehand in God—God is the εἰδεάρχις, and he is the form which gives form to all that is without form, he "is a unique formal cause, in virtue of the pre-existence of form within him and of his support of forms as they exhibit themselves in the outer world"[32] so it follows that "if you take away the One, there will survive neither whole nor part nor anything else in the creation."[33] Something similar can be found in Plotinus's *Enneads*, where he says that the absolute ugly is something that has not been entirely mastered by form,[34] that we feel "the magnificent beauty of the Exemplar," and "the Beauty sprung from this world is, itself, a copy of That."[35] Therefore, the beauty of this world is a mere likeness, a copy, of the Beauty of the Exemplar, and so for Plotinus the one who sees beautiful shapes in body should not pursue them since "he must know them for copies, vestiges, shadows."[36] Plotinus does, however, say that "the material thing becomes beautiful by communicating in the thought that flows from the Divine,"[37] but, however, he sees matter as the principle of evil and the cause of evil in soul.[38] Contrary to him Proclus completely rejects the idea of matter being evil and argues

30. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.22, 724B.
31. Ibid., IV.27, 728D.
32. Cf. Putnam, *Beauty*, 56.
33. *De divinis nominibus*, XIII.3, 980B.
34. See Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.2.
35. Ibid., V.8.8.
36. Ibid., I.6.8.
37. Ibid., I.6.2.
38. See ibid., I.8.

indeed that matter is produced by the good.[39] Interestingly for our topic, he unfolds this view that matter is not evil in his *De malorum subsistentia*, a work extensively used by Dionysius in his own treatment of evil.[40] Evidently, the Areopagite comes much closer to the views of Proclus than to those of Plotinus—while for Dionysius the body is not evil, but beautiful, or, at least, it is "a lesser beauty," for Plotinus "there is a good deal between being body and being beautiful."[41] Putnam quotes a nice passage from Gregory of Nyssa's *Homilies on the Beatitudes* which might as well be one of Dionysius's sources: "As with corporeal beauty, the beauty is first in the living person who serves as model and secondarily in what is expressed in its image by imitation; so likewise, human nature as the image of the supernatural beatitude presents also the marks of the beauty of the good by reflecting its blessed attributes."[42]

Dionysius's positive attitude toward matter and body as a glimpse of the divine beauty logically leads to the appreciation of the entire world as beautiful. The three attributes mentioned in a previous passage, beauty, form, and order,[43] together with another three, namely harmony, friendship, and community,[44] describe the wisely created cosmos and all things in it:

> Still, as I have said already, we must learn about Wisdom from all things. As Scripture says, Wisdom has made and continues always to adapt everything. It is the cause of the unbreakable accommodation and order of all things, and it is forever linking the goals of one set of things with the sources of another, and in this fashion it makes a thing of beauty of the unity and the harmony of the whole.[45]

The end of what comes before is tied with the beginning of what comes after, so that the world appears arranged according to beauty and ordered in a harmonious way. All this is possible because the order comes from

39. See Jan Opsomer, "Proclus vs Plotinus on Matter," *Phronesis: A Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 46, no. 2 (2001): 154–88.

40. See Josef Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proklos als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre von Übel," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895): 253–73; 721–48.

41. Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.1. Plotinus will later on identify the essence of beauty not in Form, but in Life, so that even the disproportionate living beings have more beauty than the symmetrical lifeless objects (*Enneads*, VI.7.22). By arguing that it is with the radiance (of life) of the Intelligible world, rather than with Form, that beauty should be identified, Plotinus declares that beauty is formless, thus "breaking completely with traditional Platonism" (Richard T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995], 87). See also Arthur H. Armstrong, "Beauty and the Discovery of Divinity in the Thought of Plotinus," in *Kephalion: Studies in Greek Philosophy and Its Continuation Offered to Professor C. J. de Vogel*, ed. Jaap Mansfeld and Lambertus M. de Rijk (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 161–62.

42. Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus* 1, PG 44, 1197B, cited in Putnam, *Beauty*, 61.

43. See *De divinis nominibus* IV.27, 728D, quoted above.

44. See ibid., IV.7, 704A.

45. Ibid., VII.3, 872B.

beauty, that is, from its source, and so the order itself represents a reflection of that beauty. As it is well known, Dionysius feels very strongly about the right order and arrangement. God is the one who assigns order, so he is also called Righteousness, since "he assigns what is appropriate to all things; he distributes their due proportion, beauty, rank, arrangement, their proper and fitting place and order, according to a most just and righteous determination."[46] The distribution of these qualities, beauty included, is therefore just and ordered, as the order is the measure of the world. Each thing receives its "due proportion," which is to mean that beauty too is not assigned to everything in equal measure, and so that is why "the name 'beauty itself' [is given] to the outpourings of what produces beauty itself, and in the same vein they [sacred teachers] talk of 'whole beauty' and 'partial beauty,' things beautiful as a whole or in part."[47] This means that each creature has its own share of beauty (and not just beauty), according to its own capacity. Beauty, then, has the power of making some things wholly beautiful or partially beautiful; it institutes harmony, community, and friendship, and unifies all things, thus establishing the mentioned "beauty of the unity and harmony of the whole." The complete possession of every beauty comes from God, and so the measure of each thing's beauty is its closeness to him, as it is from him that there comes an order, a ranking "which gets rid of all disharmony, inequality, and disproportion."[48] We have seen by now that not only God as Beauty has to do with beauty, but beauty is possessed, produced, bestowed, and ordered also by God as Wisdom, God as Righteousness, God as Lord of Lords, God as One, God as Trinity—beauty in the thinking of the Areopagite is not just one aspect of God, it is the all-encompassing character of the divinity in its entirety.

The Good and the Beautiful

Following the classical Greek ideal of καλοκἀγαθία Dionysius very often uses the expression "Good and Beautiful."[49] In fact these two terms are synonymous, beauty is the same as goodness,[50] and all things share in it. The identification of beauty and goodness is possible because of their causal

46. Ibid., VIII.6, 893D–896A.

47. Ibid., XI.6, 956B.

48. Ibid., XII.3, 972A.

49. This claim is valid for Dionysius, although it has more of an ontological than ethical connotation (Bender, *Dawn of the Invisible*, 131).

50. For example, Plato says that "all that is good is beautiful [πᾶν δὴ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καλόν]" (*Timaeus*, 87C).

role in creation—beauty identifies with goodness because it applies to one and the same Cause, while all things share in beauty and goodness as the effects participate in their cause: "The Beautiful is therefore the same as the Good, for everything looks to the Beautiful and the Good as the cause of being, and there is nothing in the world without a share of the Beautiful and the Good."[51] This is not a surprise given the fact that the divine subsistence itself is goodness, and that the Good "by the very fact of its existence, extends goodness into all things."[52] That is why this name is treated first, and it is "preeminently set apart for the supra-divine God from all other names."[53] Goodness is the source of all being, of both purely intelligent beings (angels) and human beings and animals, which are all given a gift of exemplifying God in their own manner.[54] This happens because Good is the formal cause of everything, Good "gives form to the formless."[55] If this is so, then the form of each being is goodness, which it received from God.[56] In connection to what has been previously said about Beauty as the formal cause, it follows that every thing's form is its goodness and its beauty. In the same way, since Good and Beauty are efficient causes, they institute in each being goodness and beauty. And since *logoi* of all beings are contained in God as their paradigms, all beings participate in Good and Beauty (as well as in Life, Being, etc.) to the degree which is determined by their *logoi*.[57] It is therefore natural that goodness and beauty go hand in hand.[58]

51. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.7, 704B.

52. Ibid., IV.1, 693B.

53. Ibid.

54. See ibid., IV.2, 696BD: "And, if we must speak of the matter, all this applies to the irrational souls, to the living creatures which fly through the air or walk the earth, those that live in the waters, the amphibians as well as those which are burrowed into the ground, in short, every sentient and living being. They all have soul and life because of the existence of the Good. And the plants too have nourishment and life and motion from this same Good. So also with soulless and lifeless matter. It is there because of the Good; through it they receive their state of existence."

55. Ibid., IV3, 697A.

56. See Perl, *Theophany*, 41.

57. See Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 116.

58. While Dionysius identifies the Good with the Beautiful, for Plotinus the Good is primary to the Beautiful: "This love of Beauty is later than the love of Good and comes with a more sophisticated understanding; hence we know that Beauty is secondary: the more primal appetition, not patent to sense, our movement toward our good, gives witness that the Good is the earlier, the prior" (Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.5.12). However, Plotinus also says: "Shape and idea and measure will always be beautiful, but the Authentic Beauty and the Beyond-Beauty cannot be under measure and therefore cannot have admitted shape or be Idea: the primal existent, the First, must be without Form; the beauty in it must be, simply, the Nature of the Intellectual Good" (ibid., VI.7.33). On Plotinus's abandoning of the identification of Good and Beauty, see Francisco García Bazán, "Plotino y la fenomenología de la belleza," *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía* 22 (2005): 14–20.

The Good is also called the "light" which is its image and in which the archetypal Good is revealed. As such, it "gives light to everything capable of receiving it, it creates them, keeps them alive, preserves and perfects them," and "everything looks to it for measure, eternity, number, order."[59] And so the Good returns all things to itself as it is their own goal, not just for beings endowed with mind and reason, but also for those lacking perception, and even for lifeless forms.[60] However, despite these characteristics of the Good, it still remains transcendent, out of reach of any rational discourse, since no words "come up to the inexpressible Good, this One, this Source of all unity, this supra-existent Being," going beyond mind and speech, and incomprehensible by any intuition or name. It is the cause of all existence, and thus it transcends existence, so that "it alone could give an authoritative account of what it really is."[61] Dionysius here uses the well-known "hyper" language, by which he explains the transcendence of the Good, quite in similar terms as did Plato: "The good itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power."[62]

God is the cause of all beings and of all their characteristics; he is such as the Beautiful, the One, and the Good, and generates a plurality of the good and the beautiful. Oneness, Beauty, and Goodness, as names of God, are united as a unique cause of all existence:

> From it derives the existence of everything as beings, what they have in common and what differentiates them, their identicalness and differences, their similarities and dissimilarities, their sharing of opposites, the way in which their ingredients maintain identity, the providence of the higher ranks of beings, the interrelationship of those of the same rank, the return upward by those of lower status, the protecting and unchanged remaining and foundation of all things amid themselves.[63]

It is easy here to notice that, apart from causality of all things, there is also an identification of the One-Beauty-Good with Love, which has the form of providence of higher ranks, interrelationship among equals, and return of lower ranks. And indeed, "all things must desire, must yearn for, must love the Beautiful and the Good."[64]

59. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.3, 697C.
60. See ibid., IV.3, 700B.
61. Ibid., IV.1, 588B.
62. Plato, *The Republic*, ed. James Adam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 509B. Plato here also mentions the sun as giving not just visibility, but also genesis and nurture, although it is not genesis, and so the Good gives essence and existence, although the Good itself is not essence and existence.
63. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.7, 704B.
64. Ibid., IV.10, 708A.

The Good and the Beautiful are also the cause of every being's movement, since it establishes "each being to an appropriate principle and gives each the movement suitable to it."[65] Every motion is, according to Aristotle, a kind of ἐνέργεια but an incomplete (ἀτελής) one;[66] and this is because it does not contain its own end, but it is directed toward an end outside of itself. In Dionysius's case, the end is the Good and the Beautiful, that is, God. Again, if one follows Aristotle, motion's purpose is cessation, self-annihilation—final rest is motion's ultimate activity,[67] and this rest for Dionysius is found in God; that is why he proclaims that God is "the origin, the preserver, the goal, and the objective of rest and of motion."[68] This movement has three forms: circular, linear, and spiral. Circle, line, and spiral may also be paired with the famous scheme of the causal process, rest–procession–conversion, where circle aligns with rest, line with procession, and spiral with conversion.[69] In Dionysius, both intelligences and souls move in this fashion.[70] The movement of intelligences is thus described:

> First they move in a circle while they are at one with those illuminations which, without beginning and without end, emerge from the Good and the Beautiful. Then they move in a straight line when, out of Providence, they come to offer unerring guidance to all those below them. Finally they move in a spiral, for even while they are providing for those beneath them they continue to remain what they are and they turn unceasingly around the Beautiful and the Good from which all identity comes.[71]

These three movements, then, concern the relationship that the intelligences have with the Good and the Beautiful, with others, and with themselves. The circular movement is about the union with the illuminations of the Good and the Beautiful; the linear movement refers to the providence for the inferior ranks, while the third, the spiral movement, concerns again the providence, but without going out of themselves.[72]

Souls too have movement which develops in the same three ways:

65. Ibid., IV.7, 704C.

66. See Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), III.2, 201B.

67. See Aryeh Kosman, "Aristotle's Definition of Motion," *Phronesis: A Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (1969): 56–57.

68. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.10, 705C.

69. On this and the Neoplatonic use of the circle/line/spiral scheme, see Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation in the Prehistory of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 72–76; and Spearritt, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 93–105.

70. On Gregory Nazianzen's idea of movement, see Bergmann, *Creation Set Free*, 115–33.

71. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.8, 704D–705A.

72. Cf. Andia, *Henosis*, 137, esp. no. 36, for the Neoplatonic sources of the triple movement.

First it moves in a circle [κυκλικὴ], that is, it turns within itself and away from what is outside, and there is an inner concentration of its intellectual powers. A sort of fixed revolution causes it to return from the multiplicity of externals, to gather in upon itself and then, in this undispersed condition, to join those who are themselves in a powerful union. From there the revolution brings the soul to the Beautiful and the Good, which is beyond all things, is one and the same, and has neither beginning nor end. But whenever the soul receives, in accordance with its capacities, the enlightenment of divine knowledge and does so not by way of the mind, nor in some mode arising out of its identity, but rather through discursive reasoning, in mixed and changeable activities, then it moves in a spiral fashion [ἑλικοειδῶς]. And its movement is in a straight line [κατ' εὐθεῖαν δέ] when, instead of circling in upon its own intelligent unity (for this is the circular), it proceeds to the things around it, and is uplifted from external things, as from certain variegated and pluralized symbols, to the simple and united contemplations.[73]

Therefore, the circular movement of the soul has as its goal the Good and the Beautiful, and this movement happens due to a "fixed revolution" coming from its inner intelligent unity; it is the movement in which the soul abandons outside distraction and concentrates upon herself and her own intellectual powers in an attempt to go from multiplicity to unity and to concentrate on God. The spiral movement happens when the soul is encouraged by divine knowledge which is given to her by illumination, and then proceeds through discursive rational reasoning (unlike the intuitive proceeding of the angels) and operations. Finally, the linear (straight) movement is anagogical, in which the soul is uplifted from external things, symbols, to theory, that is, contemplation.[74]

Dionysius here follows Iamblichus, for whom heavenly beings possess immediate access to the divine, so they move circularly, while embodied souls have to proceed outside themselves to reach the unity of the Nous, so they move in a linear manner.[75] Employing geometrical analogies to the causal scheme was not foreign to Neoplatonists, as the circle would mean a sort of stability and unity, a straight line would be associated with procession,[76] while the conversion would be a combination of the two, and therefore a spiral.[77] The different types of movement are, however, older

73. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.9, 705AB.

74. Cf. Charles-André Bernard, "Les formes de la théologie chez Denys l'Aréopagite," *Gregorianum* 59, no. 1 (1978): 39–69; Andia, *Henosis*, 138–40.

75. See Iamblichus, *In Platonis Timaeum*, 49. See Gregory Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7, no. 4 (1999): 584.

76. See Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem*, 1130.7.

77. See Gersh, From *Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 74–75.

than both Iamblichus and Dionysius. They are present to some extent in Plato, who argues that the nature of the movement of the Intellect is circular which implies the unity, while in discussing the difference between sensual and intellective knowledge, he alludes that in the former the circle of the object moves straightforward, while in the latter it is well-rounded.[78] Aristotle too mentions the threefold motion in the eighth book of his *Physics*: "The motion of everything that is in process of locomotion is either rotatory or rectilinear, or a compound of the two."[79] This is the sense in which the Areopagite's motion theory should be understood, in terms of two basic movements, circular and linear, and a third one, which is the vector sum of the first two. In angels the spiral movement occurs because they move providentially in linear manner, but they do not cease to circle around the Good and the Beautiful. Similarly, souls have to concentrate by moving circularly, but they also need to proceed out of themselves through symbols by moving in a linear way; thus what happens is the simultaneous interiorization and exteriorization of the soul, that is, unity and multiplicity at once, which results in the combination of the two movements represented by the image of the spiral.

In this way Dionysius defines the great circle of Good and Beauty, which is the cause of these forms of movement, and "the source, the origin, the preserver, the goal, and the objective of rest and of motion."[80] All the characteristics of the created world come from the Good and the Beautiful, and for the Areopagite it is not superfluous to enumerate them: small, equal, great in nature, measure, proportion, mixture, totality, multitude, partiality, quality, quantity, distinction, unity, magnitude, infinity, limitless and the limited, boundaries, orders, elements and forms, all being, power, activity, perception, expression, conception, understanding, etc.: "To put the matter, briefly, all being derives from, exists in, and is returned toward the Beautiful and the Good. Whatever there is, whatever comes to be, is there and has being on account of the Beautiful and the Good."[81] The Good and the Beautiful appear as the cause, the preservation, and the goal, of everything intelligible and sensible. And again the Good and the Beautiful are praised as the paradigmatic, final, efficient, formal, and elemental cause, as the principle and as the end:

78. See Plato, *Leges*, 898AB.
79. Aristotle, *Phys*ics, VIII.8, 261B.
80. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.10, 705C.
81. Ibid., IV.10, 705CD.

Every source exists for the sake of it, because of it, and in it; and this is so whether such source [ἀρχὴ] be exemplary, final, efficient, formal, or elemental [παραδειγματική, τελική, ποιητική, εἰδική, στοιχειώδης]. In short, every source, all preservation and ending [πᾶσα ἀρχή, πᾶσα συνοχή, πᾶν πέρας], everything in fact derives from the Beautiful and the Good. Even what is still not there exists transcendentally in the Beautiful and the Good. Here is the source of all which transcends every source, here is an ending which transcends completion.[82]

Dionysius here enumerates fives sources (beginnings, principles) which correspond to the four Aristotelian causes, formal, final, efficient, and material (which is what Dionysius means by elemental cause), to which he adds the paradigmatic, or exemplary. All this Dionysius corroborates with the famous Pauline saying, "For from Him and through Him and in Him and to Him are all things."[83] If this is so, then it is natural that our author will exclaim that "there is nothing in the world without a share of the Beautiful and the Good."[84] If there is not Good, then there is no being, life, desire, movement,[85] since everything that exists comes from the Good, so that everything existent, by the very desire to exist and to think, is itself good in desiring the Beautiful and the Good,[86] and even "anger has a share in the Good to the extent it is an urge to remedy seeming evils by returning them toward what seems beautiful."[87]

The identification of Good and Beauty and the frequent pairing of the two terms ("the Good and the Beautiful") follows not only from the fact that these are names applied to one God, but also from Dionysius's overall metaphysical conception of the procession and conversion. Putnam's claim that the only point of difference between good and beauty is in that "the great work of the good is to give, while the task of the beautiful is to attract" can be only apparently true.[88] In the Areopagite's system procession and conversion are one and the same, and so giving and attracting coincide and are two facets of the same path, as Good and Beauty are just two names of the same God.[89] And he is quite explicit in affirming the unity between different divine names:

82. Ibid., IV.10, 705D–708A.
83. Rom 11:36. Cf. Col 1:16.
84. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.7, 704B.
85. See ibid., IV.20, 720C.
86. See ibid., IV.23, 725C.
87. Ibid., IV.20, 720C.
88. Putnam, *Beauty*, 71.
89. Cf. Bender, *Dawn of the Invisible*, 134n126.

I do not think of the Good as one thing, Being as another, Life and Wisdom as yet other, and I do not claim that there are numerous causes and different Godheads, all differently ranked, superior and inferior, and all producing different effects. No. But I hold that there is one God for all these good processions and that he is the possessor of the divine names of which I speak and that the first name tells of the universal Providence of the one God, while the other names reveal general or specific ways in which he acts providentially.[90]

It would not be correct, then, to think that the Good is the cause, while Beauty is the goal—both Good and Beauty are at the same time cause and goal, source and end, which Dionysius never fails to affirm.

Beauty in the Cosmos

In the ambit of his cosmological structure, Dionysius develops the system of the two hierarchies, celestial and ecclesiastical, of which the former concerns divine intelligences (angels), while the latter is called "our" hierarchy, since it refers to human beings. According to the Areopagite, "a hierarchy is a sacred order [τάξις], a state of understanding [ἐπιστήμη], and an activity [ἐνέργεια] approximating as closely as possible to the divine."[91] This is in fact not just a definition of the hierarchy, it is a brief recapitulation of the entire Dionysian concept of the world—order, knowledge, and activity are its main characteristics, while the supreme goal is approaching God, that is, acquiring likeness and oneness with him. That is why God himself is the leader of the hierarchy's understanding and activity, and the hierarchy bears the mark of God and causes its members to be his images. That is why the hierarchy is unwaveringly "looking at the comeliness of God [θειοτάτην εὐπρέπειαν]."[92] The hierarchy then conforms to God and leads to the imitation of him, while its first and principal commitment is to beauty, "so simple, so good, so much the source of perfection."[93] It is surely not by chance that of all the names of God, Dionysius chose Beauty and placed the hierarchy in the aesthetic sphere. Hierarchy as knowledge means light which comes from Beauty, while hierarchy as activity means illumination,[94] en-

90. *De divinis nominibus*, V.2, 816C–817A.
91. *De coelesti hierarchia*, III.1, 164D.
92. Ibid., III.2, 165A.
93. Ibid., III.1, 164D.
94. The content of the hierarchy is knowledge which is passed on through different ranks. To receive knowledge is to be illumined, enlightened. The connection between hierarchy and light or splendor is a central motif here: "Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself.

lightenment of different hierarchical ranks in harmony with its archetype, which is nothing else but the beauty, the divine comeliness (εὐπρέπεια).[95] This leads to the imitation of God, which means perfection of the members of the hierarchy. This is "a perfect arrangement, an image of the beauty of God [εἰκόνα τῆς θεαρχικῆς ὡραιότητος], which sacredly works out the mysteries of its own enlightenment in the orders and levels of understanding of the hierarchy."[96]

The rising up to God and contemplation of the hierarchies happens with the help of material things, which are according to our nature. These material means of guidance are themselves beautiful because they reflect the hidden, invisible beauty: "Hence, any thinking person realizes that the appearances of beauty are signs of an invisible loveliness. The beautiful odors which strike the senses are representations of a conceptual diffusion. Material lights are images of the outpouring of an immaterial gift of light."[97]

Just as the beauty of material things is a sign of an invisible beauty, so orders and ranks in the hierarchies are images of the harmony of the divine realm. The Eucharist is a symbol of participation in Jesus, and so "the source of spiritual perfection provided us with perceptible images of those heavenly minds,"[98] which happens out of his concern for us. It represents a concession to our imperfect nature, which has the task to become more perfect and more godlike. What is important to note is that Dionysius's use of "image" does not imply some kind of obscuration or shadowy imitation of the ideal; on the contrary, image has an ontological value, in fact it reveals the ideal and is a real presence.[99] That is why Dionysius is not interested in the artistic aspects of image or of its aesthetic conceptions. For him, the purpose of images and symbols, aesthetic objects, is anagogy, and not artistic pleasure: "The Word of God makes use of poetic imagery when discussing these formless intelligences [angels] but, as I have already said, it does so not for the sake of art, but as a concession to the nature of

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It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendor they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God's will to beings further down the scale" (ibid., III.2, 165A). Cf. also, "By itself it [the Good] generously reveals a firm, transcendent beam, granting enlightenments proportionate to each being, and thereby draws sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation, to participation and to the state of becoming like it" (*De divinis nominibus*, I.2, 588CD).

95. See Viktor Bychkov, "Na podstupah k esteticheskomu soznaniyu avtora 'Areopagitik,'" *Vestnik slavyanskih kultur* 17, no. 3 (2010): 16.

96. *De coelesti hierarchia*, III.2, 165B.

97. Ibid., I.3, 121D.

98. Ibid., I.3, 124A.

99. See Golitzin, *Et introibo*, 127.

our own mind. It uses scriptural passages in an uplifting fashion as a way, provided for us from the first, to uplift our mind in a manner suitable to our nature."[100] The purpose is to discover the hidden beauty:

> There are too those other sacred pictures boldly used to represent God, so that what is hidden may be brought out into the open and multiplied, what is unique and undivided may be divided up, and multiple shapes and forms be given to what has neither shape nor form. All this is to enable the one capable of seeing the beauty hidden within these images to find that they are truly mysterious, appropriate to God, and filled with a great theological light.[101]

Therefore, the Areopagite's aesthetics has an ontological and anagogical, rather than a poetic, significance.

All members of the hierarchies share in God, which means that they share in the Good and the Beautiful. Angels, members of the celestial hierarchy, "live in a fashion surpassing other living things"; and their knowledge is beyond reason, so "they desire and participate in the Beautiful and the Good in a way far above the things which exist."[102] This is no wonder, since they are much closer to the Good, and so they participate in it more than others. This is in accordance with Dionysius's view that everything has a share in God in a proportionate way, that is, according to its own capacity. That is why angels' participation is of a greater extent.

The first rank of angels (seraphim, cherubim, thrones) is the closest to God, and their likeness to God is completely uncontaminated, so they have a primary participation in "the knowledge of the divine lights." However, they too are contemplative, but not, as lower ranks are, of symbols or of sacred writings, but because they are full of light beyond any knowledge and "are filled with a transcendent and triply luminous contemplation of the one who is the cause and the source of all beauty [καλλοποιοῦ καὶ ἀρχικοῦ κάλλους]."[103] They are contemplative also because

> they have been allowed to enter into communion with Jesus not by means of holy images, reflecting the likeness of God's working in forms, but by truly coming close to him in a primary participation in the knowledge of the divine lights working out of him. To be like God is their special gift and, to the extent that is allowed them, they share, with a primordial power, in his divine activities and his loving virtues [θεουργικαῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ φιλανθρώποις ἀρεταῖς].[104]

100. *De coelesti hierarchia*, II.1, 137B.
101. Dionysius, *Epistula* IX.1, 1105C.
102. *De divinis nominibus*, V.3, 817B.
103. *De coelesti hierarchia*, VII.2, 208BC.
104. Ibid.

We see here how much Dionysius praises the first set of angels, which is the closest to God. They possess a pure vision which is granted to them by the primordial light of God, and the perfection of their activity stands in noetic contemplation, noetic communion with Jesus, and knowledge of divine work—by the primordial power [πρωτουργῷ δυνάμει] they participate in theurgy and philanthropy.[105] These angels, being closest to God, "dance" around the eternal knowledge of him, and have a special priority in communicating with God and sharing in his work. They have a proper share in the divine knowledge, and imitate "as far as possible, the beauty of God's condition and activity [καλῶν ἕξεών τε καὶ ἐνεργειῶν]."[106] These angels are therefore enlightened directly by the Godhead. Their task is to transmit the enlightenment to lower ranks, since that is the all-embracing principle established by "the divine source of all order."[107] This order makes the hierarchy divine and harmonious, and "is copied by our own hierarchy which tries to imitate angelic beauty [ἀγγελικὴν εὐπρέπειαν] as far as possible."[108] In this way, the entire cosmos, composed of the two hierarchies, is an image of the divine beauty, so that the cosmos itself is beautiful and harmonious. The aesthetic value of the cosmos is highlighted not only by using expressions such as symmetry[109] or harmony,[110] but also, as Roques notes, by the prefix εὐ– which Dionysius often uses to coin εὐκοσμία or εὐταξία or εὐμετρία.[111] This is evident in a passage quoted earlier from *The Divine Names* where Dionysius speaks of Justice as a name of God because he "distributes their due proportion [εὐμετρίαν], beauty [κάλλος], rank [εὐταξίαν], arrangement [διακόσμησιν], their proper and fitting place and order [πάσας διανομὰς καὶ τάξεις]."[112] This means that beauty is not only the cause of beauty in each particular being, but it also refers to the rela-

105. See Klitenic-Wear and Dillon, *Despoiling the Hellenes*, 127.

106. *De coelesti hierarchia*, VII.4, 212A.

107. Ibid., VIII.2, 240D.

108. Ibid., VIII.2, 241C.

109. Symmetry is not to be taken as identical to beauty—it is an effect of beauty, one of its characteristics or outcomes, and not its cause, or its equivalent. The same can be said for Plotinus as well. Cf. John P. Anton, "Plotinus's Refutation of Beauty as Symmetry," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 23, no. 2 (1964): 233–37.

110. Symmetry and harmony have both an aesthetic and an ontological value. Cf. Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, 172: "The apportionment of divine grace is not a matter of reward, but of symmetry and harmony between the giver and the receiver, whereby the being and nature of the receiver is always already grounded in the allotted grace, and God primarily crowns his own gift, while correct (symmetrical) human behavior is taken up into this divinely established harmony secondarily and as a response to God's giving."

111. See Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 57; Putnam, *Beauty*, 75. See, for example, *De coelesti hierarchia*, VIII.1, 240AB; VIII.2, 241C; X.1, 273A.

112. *De divinis nominibus*, VIII.7, 893D–896A.

tionship between beings, thus placing them correctly and accordingly in a beautiful and harmonious arrangement. This is why Dionysius so often uses the word εὐπρέπεια, as Putnam notes: "Perhaps, too, this preoccupation with harmony leads him to adopt the word εὐπρέπεια which usually means comeliness or exterior charm, when he ponders the beauty of the hierarchies. Derived as it is from πρέπω, to fit or suit, εὐπρέπεια carries with it the connotation of order and thus becomes an apt term for the spiritual beauty of angels and men, arrayed in seemly fashion before the eyes of God."[113]

Since the human hierarchy is an image of the celestial one, then it too is defined as "an inspired, divine, and divinely worked understanding, activity, and perfection."[114] The superiors of that hierarchy are enlightened by Jesus himself who, as a source, underlies all hierarchy. So the superiors are assimilated into his light, while "as for us, with that yearning for beauty (τῶν καλῶν ἔρωτι) that raises us upwards (and that is raised up) to him, he pulls together all our many differences."[115] Beauty here works as the object of eros, while eros is the attractive force which leads us to him who is the principle of unity in which all our differences are pulled together. Unity, or wholeness, then, is a crucial mark of beauty—it implies identity, perfection, and selfhood.[116]

The hierarchical activity is imparted by superiors to subordinates, while subordinates follow their superiors and help in advancing their subordinates. This is how the hierarchy is a harmonious arrangement, and it is "because of this inspired, hierarchical harmony [ἱεραρχικῆς ἁρμονίας] that each one is able to have as great as possible a share in him who is truly beautiful, wise, and good."[117] Not only that each being shares in "him who is truly beautiful," but beauty, wisdom, and goodness are the source and the cause of the harmony that exists in the hierarchy; they create both the hierarchy, as an arrangement, and all the beings, as its constituents. Thus beings are beautiful both individually and collectively.

During the rite of baptism, or illumination, as Dionysius calls it, the candidate stands before the hierarch and upon being questioned why he has come, he "repudiates his ungodliness, his lack of knowledge of the truly beautiful, and the absence within himself of a God-possessed life."[118] A few

113. Putnam, *Beauty*, 77–78.
114. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.1, 369.
115. Ibid., I.1, 372AB.
116. Cf. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.7, 701C–704A.
117. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.2, 373A.
118. Ibid., II.2.5, 393D–396A.

lines later, in the "Theory," Dionysius explains that this rite is "symbolizing the sacred divine birth," and that it reflects enigmas contemplated in God "by way of natural reflection suited to the human intellect."[119] This means that in the divine birth the initiate "learns" about the true beauty, he becomes able to grasp it and to understand it. In addition, the beauty of the perceptible images present during the rite in fact reflects the divine beauty, as they are appropriate to our nature. Baptism itself is a reflection of beauty, as it is harmonious arrangement, order and proportion.[120] The initiate is summoned to a sacred contest, a combat, under the auspices of Christ himself, who as goodness gives him support, as wisdom he makes the rules, and as beauty he is the prize for the winners.[121] Baptism is, therefore, the prerequisite for being able to contemplate the divine beauty.[122]

The rites have a splendid and beautiful exterior appearance, under which the true beauty is hidden, accessible only to "people of intelligence."[123] The rites are, therefore, images of beauty, and everything in them is an image of beauty:

> We, however, when we think of the sacred synaxis must move in from effects to causes and in the light which Jesus will give us, we will be able to glimpse the contemplation of the conceptual things clearly reflecting a blessed original beauty [τῶν ἀρχετύπων κάλλος]. And you, O most divine and sacred sacrament: Lift up the symbolic garments of enigmas which surround you. Show yourself clearly to our gaze. Fill the eyes of our mind with a unifying and unveiled light.[124]

The archetypal beauty lies in the sacraments, within the hierarchy, which are the manifestations of something beyond our reality, something that we need to discover under "a unifying and unveiled light." Beauty, then, "appears in every manifestation of the unmanifest," and thus it represents "the sacredness of everything apparently profane."[125] The hymn (most probably the Creed)[126] sung during the rite, which Dionysius calls

119. Ibid., II.3.1, 397A.

120. See ibid., II.3.3, 400B.

121. See ibid., II.3.6, 401D–404A.

122. This is the liturgical prerequisite, which together with the mystical prerequisite, mentioned above in note 19, makes the contemplation of beauty possible. See Andia, *Denys l'Aréopagite*, 100.

123. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, IV.3.2, 476B.

124. Ibid., III.3.2, 428C.

125. Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, 166.

126. Although Dionysius never quotes the Creed nor does he call it by that name, it is plausible to assume that he is referring to the Symbol of faith since he calls it "that most universal song of praise in honor of that source who is the worker and the dispenser of good"; he continues by mentioning that this song is sometimes called "a confession of praise," or "a symbol of adoration," but he prefers the term "hierarchic thanksgiving," because "this hymn is the summary of all the blessed gifts

"hierarchic thanksgiving," summarizes all the gifts of God and his work for us, since "it reminds us that we owe to God's goodness our being and our life [οὐσίαν ἡμῶν καὶ ζοὴν ὑποστήσασα], that, using the everlasting model of beauty, God has made us in his image [ἀρχετύποις κάλλεσι τὸ θεοειδὲς ἡμῶν μορφώσασα] and that he has given us a share of the divine condition and uplifting."[127]

Human beings hold an eminent position in the creation, since they were made in God's image; from his archetypal beauty they received the divine form, and from his goodness they received being and life. This made it possible for us to ascend to God and to participate in the divine ἕξις. The ultimate proof of God's care for us was his taking on our own nature—the Incarnation. He became one of us, a fact that "allowed us, as those equal in birth, to enter into communion with it and to acquire a share of its own true beauty."[128] The event of Incarnation represents the watershed of all human life; it is a calling to communion with the divine, a complete change of nature, and a reception of mysterious divine light, which makes all shadows vanish, saves souls, and adorns such deiform minds with a formless beauty (ἀνείδεον κάλλεσι).[129] Here the formless beauty[130] does not mean ugliness or lesser beauty, as in the realm of perceptible, it means transcendent beauty, which is on the other side, beyond the perceptible world; and it is precisely in that realm beyond that a deified mind is found, and it is that transcendent beauty that adorns it in that state.

True beauty is hidden beauty; it is beyond understanding, and it is safeguarded from profanation. However, at the same time that it is hidden, it is also revealed, but only to minds that are capable of grasping it, and when it shows, it shows in appropriate images:

They reveal themselves solely to minds capable of grasping them. They shine within our souls only by way of appropriate images [εἰκόνας], images which, like

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which come to us from God" (*De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.3.7, 436C). See Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 102. Also Charles M. Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13n2, confirms that Dionysius alludes to the Creed, but challenges the significance of this fact for a conclusion on *terminus post quem* of the *Corpus*, since the inclusion of the Creed in the liturgy by Peter the Fuller (in A.D. 476) is not doubtlessly accepted.

127. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.3.7, 436C.

128. Ibid., III.3.11, 441B.

129. See ibid.

130. Plotinus too calls Beauty formless Form: "Bring something under Form and present it so before the mind; immediately we ask what Beyond imposed that shape. . . . Shape and idea and measure will always be beautiful, but the Authentic Beauty and the Beyond-Beauty cannot be under measure and therefore cannot have admitted shape or be Idea: the primal existent, the First, must be without Form" (*Enneads*, VI.7.33).

themselves, have the virtue of being incorruptible. Hence virtuous conformity to God [θεοειδοῦς ἀρετῆς] can only appear as an authentic image [ἄγαλμα] of its object when it rivets its attention on that conceptual and fragrant beauty [νοητὸν καὶ εὐῶδες κάλλος]. On this condition—and only on this condition—can the soul impress itself and reproduce within itself an imitation of loveliness [κάλλιστον μίμημα].[131]

Three important things are to be noted here. First, the hidden, transcendent beauty is always revealed in appropriate images. Second, even those revealed images cannot be grasped by everyone, but only by those capable of doing so. Thirdly, the only way that the soul can imitate the divine beauty is to constantly look up at the archetype,[132] at the transcendent beauty. This concentration enables sacred men to produce the likeness of God, and in doing so they "never cease to shape the power of their minds along the lines of a loveliness which is conceptual, transcendent, and fragrant [ὑπερουσίως εὐῶδη καὶ νοητὴ εὐπρέπειαν]."[133] But not everyone is capable of seeing true beauty; it requires a special way of contemplation characteristic of sacred men:

That is why they too sacredly disguise whatever is sacred and virtuously godlike in their mind, imitating and depicting God. They gaze solely on conceptual originals. Not only do they not look at dissimilar things, but they refuse to be dragged down toward the sight of them. And as one would expect of such people, they yearn only for what is truly beautiful and right [καλῶν καὶ δικαίων] and not for empty appearances. They do not gaze after that glory so stupidly praised by the mob. Imitating God, as they do, they can tell the difference between real beauty and real evil. They are the truly divine images of that infinitely divine fragrance. Because this is the truly fragrant, they have no time to return to the counterfeits which beguile the mob, and it truly impresses only those souls which are true images of itself.[134]

This capability seems to be not only ontological, but also ethical—it is not "just" an imitation of God, but it is the "virtuous conformity to God" (θεοειδοῦς ἀρετῆς). Therefore, beauty is closely bound to virtue as well, so that being virtuous is a prerequisite of being similar to God and of reflecting his beauty.[135] Transcendent beauty is something to which human be-

131. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, IV.3.1, 473B.

132. Dionysius here uses an artist as example—he always keeps eye on the original and does not allow anything else to distract him (ibid., IV.3.1, 473C).

133. Ibid.

134. Ibid., IV.3.1, 473D–476A.

135. The idea of the virtuous life as the goal of the insight into beauty itself is found in Plato's *Symposium*, where Diotima's argument concludes that the ultimate goal of grasping beauty itself is to

ings need to be lifted up in order to attain conformity to God. Conformity to God is itself beautiful, and it is the goal of true human aspiration. That is why the human hierarchy has rejected all disorder, disharmony, and confusion, and has accepted the contrary—order, harmony, and proportion. These three qualities bring about the assimilation to God as the hierarchy's ultimate end. So, for example, in clerical consecration, the mind of the initiate is made sacred since it received the call from God, and "it has been lifted up to a beauty which brings it into full conformity with God."[136] This puts it in the company of like minds, of the same order, and so the kiss between the clerics, as part of the rite, is appropriate since "it denotes the sacred communion [ἱερὰν κοινωνίαν] formed by like minds and the joyous shared love which ensures for the whole hierarchy the beauty of its conformity to God [θεοειδέστατον κάλλος]."[137] Beauty, then, allows conformity to God, and it causes the minds uplifted to it to be in sacred communion, in which they are all connected by mutual love. It is clear here how beauty interacts with the ἔρως κοινωνικός.[138]

Beauty has similar significance for monastic ordination: "The tonsure is a sign of a pure and unencumbered life, a life adorned [καλλωπίζουσαν] by no unworthy appearances forged by the mind but rising freely thanks to beauties which are not manmade [οὐκ ἀνθτρωπικοῖς κάλλεσιν] but which lift the soul in unity and monastic state up to conformity with God [θεοειδέστατον ἀναγομένην]."[139] This testifies the unique character of monastic life, which is not surrounded and adorned by manmade beautiful appearances; their state is conformed to God in a way operated by the anagogical value of noetic beauties.

At the very end of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Dionysius exclaims the hope that his work will be a useful guide on the path of attaining the divine beauty, which brings one as close as possible to God:

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live through virtue (ἀρετή), so that the real end of insight into beauty is not "images of virtue but true virtue" (*Symposium*, 212A). Cf. Hyland, *Plato and the Question of Beauty*, 112–13.

136. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, V.3.6, 513B.

137. Ibid.

138. In *De divinis nominibus*, IV.10, 708AB, Dionysius writes: "Because of it and for its sake, subordinate is returned to superior [ἐπιστρεπτικῶς], equal keeps company with equal [κοινωνικῶς], superior turns providentially to subordinate [προνοητικῶς], each bestirs itself [συνεκτικῶς] and all are stirred to do and to will whatever it is they do and will because of the yearning for the Beautiful and the Good. And we may be so bold as to claim also that the Cause of all things loves all things in the superabundance of his goodness, that because of this goodness he makes all things, brings all things to perfection, holds all things together, returns all things. The divine longing [ὁ θεῖος ἔρως] is Good seeking good for the sake of the Good."

139. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, VI.3.3, 536A.

And I believe that more stunning and more divine beauties [τηλαυγέστερα κάλλη καὶ θειότερα] will enlighten you too as you employ my remarks as steps up to a more sublime ray. Dear friend, be generous with me. Bring before my eyes that more perfect and more evident enlightenment which will be yours as you learn of a beauty more lovely and closer to the One [εὐπρεπέστερα κάλλη καὶ ἑνοειδέστερα]. For I feel sure that my words will rekindle the sparks of God's fire [θείου πυρὸς] which sleep in you.[140]

What Dionysius leaves us with is not just his intention as to what end this treatise should be used, but also the idea, full of hope and optimism, that there is a spark of God's fire sleeping in all of us, a spark that can lead us to the transcendent beauty and to the proximity to God. This idea is reflected in the entire Byzantine aesthetic endeavors which testify to an accentuated transcendence in all artistic and cultural production. Material splendor and magnificence, especially in the Church, was used to circulate mystical ideas and to represent the path to God in an aesthetic manner.[141]

In summarizing our discussion, it should be pointed out that Dionysius is not concerned with a poetic or artistic conception of beauty, but the focus of his interest is the absolute beauty, beauty in itself. Such beauty can be properly applied only to God, who is the transcendent beauty and the source of beauty in all sensible and intelligible things. Following an ancient pattern, the Areopagite often pairs Beauty with Goodness, and considers the two as synonymous and identifies them as the unique cause of all existence. Since all things tend to return to their source, as effects return to their cause, so beauty as a divine name denotes also an attractive power by which God draws all creatures to himself. Therefore, God as beauty is the source of beauty in things, the end of their movement, and the object of their erotic desire. On the level of creation, all things are beautiful in proportion to their participation in Beauty. Being created in the beautiful image of God, man reflects this beauty as a composite being, in both soul and body, which leads Dionysius to adopt a positive view of matter and body.

Participated beauty is reflected not only in living things, but in the entire cosmos, comprised of both human and angelic hierarchies, whose main characteristics are good order, proper arrangement, symmetry, and right disposition. All these attributes are in fact what Dionysius considers to be the chief marks of cosmic beauty. In this way our author elaborates

140. Ibid., VII.3.11, 568D–569A.

141. See Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 2, *Medieval Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2006), 36.

aesthetic ontology and cosmology which are reflected not only in God or in individual beings, but also in the relation between God and creation, and among beings present in the cosmos. The comprehension of such beauty incite contemplative and ethical, virtuous activities which bring about recognition of God as the cause of all beauty and incite the creature to go beyond appearances in order to be uplifted to the ineffable God as source and end of everything. This highly aestheticized understanding of God, world, and man, emphasizes the idea that the creation is indeed beautiful, but it is also just a glimpse of a higher transcendent beauty, a beauty that is absolute in a heavenly world which is man's true homeland. In his own words Dionysius himself testifies to this optimism that there is nothing without a share of the Beautiful and the Good: "Καὶ οὐκ ἔστι τι τῶν ὄντων, ὃ μὴ μετέχει τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ."[142]

142. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.7, 704B.

CHAPTER THREE DEIFICATION

Philosophical Background

As noted previously, Dionysius's entire thought is wholly intertwined with the idea of deification. Although the vocabulary of deification was not foreign to the ancient philosophical and religious doctrines, or to the early Christian environment, it is the Areopagite who gave to it its shape and content. In doing so, our author does not use Athanasius's term θεοποίησις (or as a verb θεοποιέω) which one would expect, since it is a term more commonly used in the periods before Dionysius, though he employs the term θέωσις, which is found in Gregory Nazianzen.[1] Despite its occurrence in Gregory, it is only with Dionysius that θέωσις became the standard term for the Christian concept of deification.[2] This is not surprising given the fact that the term is more frequent in Dionysius and that it was he who actually gave the very definition of the notion. In *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* he writes:

> Now this blessed Deity [θεαρχικωτάτη] which transcends everything and which is one and also triune has resolved, for reasons unclear to us but obvious to itself, to ensure the salvation of rational beings, both ourselves and those beings who are our superior. This can only happen with the divinization [θεουμένων] of the saved. And divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God [ἡ δὲ θὲωσις ἐστιν ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσίς τε καὶ ἕνωσις].[3]

Three things are important in this passage. First, Dionysius states that we do not know the reason for which God had decided to save us. This

1. On Gregory's deification language and doctrine, see Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 232ff.

2. On the deification doctrine before Dionysius, see Andia, *Henosis*, 298–300; and Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*.

3. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.3, 373D–376A.

could be quite a peculiar statement in the mind of a Christian believer who craves for salvation but does not know why God wants him to be saved. However, it is in his apophatic manner that Dionysius affirms that a rational being cannot know what God knows, and that God's knowledge transcends all human knowledge; so it is with the reasons for salvation—these are unknown to us, but obvious to God. It seems that the Areopagite is eager to safeguard God's absolute transcendence even when it comes to why we should be saved. The second significant claim is that salvation happens through deification, and this identification of salvation and deification is of the utmost importance for Christian soteriology. Finally and most importantly, we have the definition of the notion of deification, which involves assimilation to and union with God. The idea of assimilation to God, of becoming like God, is not Dionysius's innovation—it is present also in Plato and his successors. For instance, it is in the famous passage from *Theaetetus* that Plato speaks of becoming like God:

> But it is impossible that evils should be done away with, Theodorus, for there must always be something opposed to the good; and they cannot have their place among the gods, but must inevitably hover about mortal nature and this earth. Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible [ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν]; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise.[4]

Plato here describes assimilation to God as an escape from earthly things, a detachment from the world in which one lives. Just before this passage, Socrates's words present the philosopher, an unworldly person, as the one who pursues this ideal, and who is not interested in ephemeral phenomena but instead dedicates his attention to higher things.[5] In this way he achieves his goal, his *telos*, which is godlikeness, consisting in being just, holy, and wise. It follows, for Plato, that the true model of justice, holiness, and wisdom is God; and so the Athenian Stranger in *Laws* will say that "God will be 'the measure of all things' in the highest degree—a

4. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176AB.

5. I shall not discuss the different interpretations of the way in which the ideal of godlikeness is achieved, that is, if Plato really thinks that the likeness to God is achieved through complete detachment from the world, or that this requires active engagement in the city. On these issues see, for example, Culbert G. Rutenber, *The Doctrine of the Imitation of God in Plato* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1946); Armstrong, "After the Ascent"; Anna Lännström, "Socrates, the Philosopher in the *Theaetetus* Digression (172C–177C), and the Ideal of *Homoiôsis Theôi*," *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 44 (2011): 111–30.

degree much higher than is any 'man' they talk of."[6] Plato obviously rejects any kind of relativism regarding the values he talks about, rather he goes against Protagoras by stating objective standards for values.[7]

The *Theaetetus* passage is adopted by Plotinus in his *Enneads*, where he speaks of virtues and explains how one can become like God while confined by human nature.[8] The response is through virtues, which Plotinus divides into civic virtues and purifying virtues. The latter are, of course, more important, and they bring about an escape from worldly things and detachment from the body, so as the one who attains these virtues will "live, no longer, the human life of the good man—such as Civic Virtue commends—but, leaving this beneath him, will take up instead another life, that of the Gods."[9] Plotinus also testifies about his experience of the union with God, which, as Porphyry claims, happened four times.[10] This is how Plotinus writes about it:

> Many times it has happened: Lifted out of the body into myself; becoming external to all other things and self-encentered; beholding a marvelous beauty; then, more than ever, assured of community with the loftiest order; enacting the noblest life, acquiring identity with the divine; stationing within It by having attained that activity; poised above whatsoever within the Intellectual is less than the Supreme: yet, there comes the moment of descent from intellection to reasoning, and after that sojourn in the divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how did the soul ever enter into my body, the soul which, even within the body, is the high thing it has shown itself to be.[11]

In this quite extraordinary account of Plotinus's mystical experience, we are told that it does not involve the body, which is typical for the Neoplatonic devaluation of the matter, and that it fills the mystic with beauty and establishes identity with the divine. This experience, however, is not permanent but is of a temporary character—at a certain point the soul descends, but it still remembers her sojourn in the divine, which encourages further philosophizing.

The idea of the union with God is found in Proclus too, who writes:

6. Plato, *Leges*, 716C.

7. See David Sedley, "The Ideal of Godlikeness," in *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 311–12.

8. See Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.2.

9. Ibid., I.2.7.

10. See Porphyry, *On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 23.

11. Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.8.1.

Considering such to be the dialogue's [*Parmenides*] purpose, our master denied that it was about Being, or about real beings alone; he admitted that it was about all things, but insisted on adding "in so far as all things are the offspring of one cause and are dependent on this universal cause," and indeed, if we may express our own opinion, in so far as all things are deified [τεθέωται]; for each thing, even the lowest grade of being you could mention, becomes god [τεθεῶσθαι] by participating in unity according to its rank. For if God and One are the same because there is nothing greater than God and nothing greater than the One, then to be unified is the same as to be deified [τεθεῶσθαι].[12]

Proclus clearly identifies deification with the union with God, which in this instance comes from the participation in unity and echoes the usual Neoplatonic scheme of procession and return—all things come from the One, which is their cause, and all things return to the One, thus being unified with it, and since One and God are the same, so to be unified with the One means to be like God, that is, to be deified. Furthermore, the return is accomplished through likeness:

For that which reverts endeavors to be conjoined in every part with every part of its cause, and desires to have communion in it and be bound to it. But all things are bound together by likeness [ὁμοιότης]. As by unlikeness they are distinguished and severed. If, then, reversion [ἐπιστροφὴ] is a communion [κοινωνία] and conjunction, and all communion and conjunction is through likeness, it follows that all reversion must be accomplished through likeness.[13]

It is clear how Proclus sees attaining likeness as the vehicle of accomplishing union with God, and if union with God means being deified, then, for Proclus, deification is operated through the process of return (ἐπιστροφὴ). In Proclus's scheme this is a chain of different levels in which each thing is deified by its immediate superior:

If Plato at once went on to call the world a god on account of the Soul, by virtue of its participation in Soul, we should not be astonished. For each thing is deified [ἐκθεοῦται] through what is immediately prior to it, the corporeal world through Soul and Soul through Intellect. As the Athenian stranger said, by receiving divine Intellect soul becomes a god. Intellect becomes a god through the One, which is why Intellect is divine but not God.[14]

It appears, according to Proclus, that only the One and self-complete (αὐτοτέλειον) henads can be considered gods in the proper sense, while

12. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem*, I.641.
13. Proclus, *Elementa theologiae*, prop. 32.
14. Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum*, III.174B.

all others, such as Soul and Intellect, are just divine by participation. Going back to Dionysius, one could say that he combines the (Neo-)Platonic ideas of godlikeness, union with God, participation, the movements of procession and return, and uses them for his elaboration of the doctrine of deification. Thus for him too deification means attaining likeness to God and being united with God, since godlikeness and unity go hand in hand as the product of the return to the source of being and highest self-realization. However, the main point on which the Areopagite differs from his Platonic sources is the genuinely Christian color of his doctrine: (a) he insists on God as the Trinity, by saying explicitly "Deity which transcends everything and which is one and also triune,"[15] and (b) he places deification in the clearly soteriological context by affirming that salvation happens only through deification. The second point is particularly important, since from the Christian viewpoint God is not just a source of levels of being, but he also has the distinctive will to save what he has created, and this belongs to the very purpose of making the world.

Nevertheless, Dionysius stays faithful to the concept of return while enriching it with God's outreaching to creation—God, both monad and one in three persons, "transcendentally draws everything into its perennial embrace," through the providence which "reaches from the most exalted beings in heaven above to the lowliest creatures of earth."[16] This providential outreach is often described as the divine light that spreads toward creation and lifts it up. In this way the light "returns us back to the oneness and deifying simplicity [ἑνότητα καὶ θεοποιὸν ἁπλότητα] of the Father who gathers us in."[17] The processions of light, coming from the Father, incite the creation to the anagogical, uplifting movement toward the unity, which, in the end, means deifying simplicity.[18]

This outreach of God toward the creation is another point of difference between the Areopagite and Proclus, who states that "by the One in ourselves do we apprehend the One."[19] On the contrary, Dionysius's God grants illumination not from the inside, but from the outside, and so the

15. See *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.3, 373D–376A, quoted above.

16. *De coelesti hierarchia*, VII.4, 212CD.

17. Ibid., I.1, 120B.

18. Although the Light proceeds from God, it never loses its stability and unity: "Of course this ray never abandons its own proper nature, or its own interior unity. Even though it works itself outward to multiplicity and proceeds outside of itself as befits its generosity, doing so to lift upward and to unify those beings for which it has a providential responsibility, nevertheless it remains inherently stable and it is forever one with its own unchanging identity." (Ibid., I.2, 121B)

19. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem*, VII.48.

"discovery" of God is not merely an intellectual endeavor, but is something that he grants through revelation. Norman Russell sums up the difference between Proclus and Dionysius as follows:

> Proclus's system is fundamentally polytheistic. The procession from the One results in inferior divine entities, with the result that the henads at the head of each series are divinities corresponding to the traditional gods. Moreover, the philosophical ascent of the human soul, even if assisted by theurgy, is essentially an intellectual process. With Dionysius the henads correspond to the attributes of God. These attributes contain the whole of God—they are only conceptually separable from him. It is through participation in these attributes that the believer rises up to God. But they are not simply discovered by intellectual reasoning. They are revealed by God.[20]

Russell's observations are well-founded in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, not just through its overall meaning and implicit conclusions, but also through open criticisms of the pagan tradition, such as the following passage:

> The absolute being underlying individual manifestations of being as their cause is not a divine or an angelic being, for only transcendent being itself can be the source, the being, and the cause of the being of beings. Nor have we to do with some other life-producing divinity distinct from that supra-divine life which is the originating Cause of all living beings and of life itself. Nor, in summary, is God to be thought of as identical with those originating and creative beings and substances [οὐσίας καὶ ὑποστάσεις] which men stupidly describe as certain gods [θεοὺς] or creators of the world [δημιουργοὺς]. Such men, and their fathers before them, had no genuine or proper knowledge of beings of this kind. Indeed, there are no such beings. What I am trying to express is something quite different. "Being itself," "life itself," "divinity itself," are names signifying source, divinity, and cause, and these are applied to the one transcendent cause and source beyond source of all things. But we use the same terms in a derivative fashion and we apply them to the provident acts of power [προνοητικὰς δυνάμεις] which come forth from that God in whom nothing at all participates.[21]

In this important passage, Dionysius seems to be quite critical of his alleged master Proclus and the Neoplatonic tradition, which should not be taken lightly within the discussion of our author's allegedly unquestionable affiliation to Neoplatonism. Being and life cannot be considered as distinct entities, separate from the One, and nor can the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation be accepted. What the Areopagite says is that (a) only God

20. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 258.
21. *De divinis nominibus*, XI.6, 953D–956A.

can be the cause of all beings, and not some "lesser" divinities or angels; (b) God cannot be identified with creative essences and hypostases, like "some men" (pagan thinkers) believe, and (c) all these names are in fact attributes of God, in which different beings participate, while at the same time God remains transcendent and unparticipated.[22] By participating in the attributes of God, creation comes closer to him as the source of everything, the "source of perfection for those being made perfect, source of divinity for those being deified (τῶν θεουμένων θεαρχία), principle of simplicity for those turning toward simplicity, point of unity for those made one."[23] By participating in the attributes, creation participates in God, since every term is ascribed to him as to a totality, such as beauty, wisdom, light, cause, deifying power (τὸ θεοποιὸν), etc.[24]

At the same time he remains in himself and gives himself, because he is "providentially available to all things and becomes all things in all for the salvation [σωτηρίαν] of them all."[25] Simultaneously, Dionysius repeats the theme of return by saying that "with unswerving power he gives himself outward for the sake of the divinization of those who are returned to him [πρὸς ἐκθέωσιν τῶν ἐπεστραμμένων]."[26] Since God is available to all things for the sake of their salvation, and since he gives himself for the sake of divinization, it can be posited that salvation coincides with deification, and it all happens in a divine–human cooperation, in which God gives himself to creation, while the creation is returned to God. This means that deification is partly the responsibility of the creation, since, as Dionysius implies, God "grants the power for deification itself [θέωσιν δύναμιν]," however, power does not automatically mean realization—while in God δύναμις and ἐνέργεια might be taken to be one and the same, on the creation's part δύναμις is not immediately translated into ἐνέργεια. Therefore, when it concerns creation, deification as cooperation means the realization of δύναμις as ἐνέργεια.[28] This ultimately means self-realization and actualization of one's own proper natural powers.

However important creation's return might be, it is still not the only

22. See Kharlamov's more detailed discussion in *The Beauty of the Unity*, 149–52.

23. *De divinis nominibus*, I.3, 589C.

24. See ibid., II.1, 637B.

25. Ibid., IX.5, 912D.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., VIII.5, 893A.

28. Andia, *Henosis*, 109–11, gives an overview of the relationship ὄνομα-δύναμις, that is, all the divine names and their corresponding powers. See also Golitzin, *Et introibo*, 101–3; and Lilla, *Dionigi l'Areopagita*, 199–226.

prerequisite of salvation-deification; in fact, the *conditio sine qua non* of the entire process is God's decision to reveal himself, as "the generous giving of self for the divinization of whatever is being returned to it [πρὸς ἐκθέωσιν τῶν ἐπεστραμμένων]."[29] The only knowledge one can hold regarding divinity is the result of having a share in what divinity itself has granted, whereby true nature remains unknown. Thus divinity is manifested through certain activities known to us, "activities which deify, cause being, bear life, and give wisdom [δυνάμεις ἐκθεωτικὰς ἢ οὐσιοποιοὺς ἢ ζωογόνους ἢ σοφοδώρους]."[30] These active powers correspond, cataphatically expressed, to different attributes of God (Deity, Being, Life, Wisdom), and are part of the thearchical reality, which means that God as Deity deifies, as Being gives being, as Life vivifies, and as Wisdom gives wisdom. Beings participate in these accordingly, since "everything in some way partakes of the providence flowing out of this transcendent Deity which is the originator of all that is,"[31] and so all existent beings participate in Being, all living beings participate in Life and all intelligent beings participate in Wisdom,[32] while those who are deified participate in Deity—the divine attributes (names) actually represent a "minitext that reveals the deity's relationship to the world and explains his nature."[33] However, there can be no real likeness to the Cause, since it absolutely transcends everything, and so "we find ourselves witnessing no divinization, no life, no being which bears any real likeness to the absolutely transcendent Cause of all things."[34] In this way Dionysius safeguards the absolute transcendence of God and the ontological gap between him and creation, but still he reaffirms God's constant immanence in the world—despite being transcendent, he reveals himself through different activities in which creation can participate. Dionysius restates the difference between the divine reality and the reality of this world, thus protecting himself from the possible pantheistic flavor of his doctrine:

29. *De divinis nominibus*, XII.3, 972A.

30. Ibid., II.7, 645A.

31. *De coelesti hierarchia*, IV.1, 177D.

32. Ibid.

33. Naomi Janowitz, "Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius," *History of Religions* 30, no. 4 (1991): 367: "for Pseudo-Dionysius, exegesis of the revealed names, combined with the cosmological picture developed in the other treatises, is enough to understand the entire world, from the far-off God to the lowest part of matter."

34. *De divinis nominibus*, II.7, 645B. It is interesting to note here that Dionysius uses ἐμφερής for likeness, a word which, according to Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, refers to divine transcendence, the Trinity, or Christ. Therefore, Dionysius is even linguistically cautious when talking about likeness to God, as in his treatises on hierarchy he will use the word ἀφομοίωσις.

The procession of our intellectual activity can at least go this far, that all fatherhood and all sonship are gifts bestowed by that supreme source of Fatherhood and Sonship on us and on the celestial powers. This is why Godlike [deiform, θεοειδεῖς] minds come to be and to be named "Gods" or "Sons of Gods" or "Father of Gods." Fatherhood and Sonship of this kind are brought to perfection in a spiritual fashion, that is, incorporeally, immaterially, and in the domain of mind, and this is the work of the divine Spirit, which is located beyond all conceptual immateriality and all divinization, and it is the work too of the Father and of the Son who supremely transcend all divine Fatherhood and Sonship. In reality there is no exact likeness between caused and cause, for the caused carry within themselves only such images of their originating sources as are possible for them, whereas the causes themselves are located in a realm transcending the caused, according to the argument regarding their source.[35]

The godlike minds are then called gods,[36] because they attain the likeness of God, as far as it is possible to them, but the "real" likeness will never be possible, since God is absolutely transcendent and absolutely different, just as in the example Dionysius uses to illustrate what he means, when he says that "joys and woes are said to be the cause in us of joy and woe without themselves being the possessors of such feelings," and in the same way "fire which warms and burns is never said itself to be burnt and warmed."[37] The deification itself does not mean the multiplication of God:

Furthermore, since there are many who are by his gift [godlikeness, deiformity, θεοειδεῖ] raised, so far as they can be [κατὰ δύναμιν], to divinization, it would seem that there is not only differentiation but actual replication of the one God. In fact he is nothing less than the archetypal God [ἀρχίθεος], the supra-divine, transcendentally one God who dwells indivisibly in every individual and who is in himself undifferentiated unity with no commixture and no multiplication arising out of his presence among the many.[38]

God is the model, or archetype (or source of gods—ἀρχίθεος) to which everything should strive in order to be deified according to their potential (κατὰ δύναμιν) and thanks to the gift of godlikeness with which they have been bestowed. This potential of being godlike seems to be present in everything, since God "dwells indivisibly in every individual," however, this

35. *De divinis nominibus*, II.8, 645CD.

36. See also *De coelesti hierarchia*, XII.3, 293B: "You will also notice how God's word gives the title of 'gods' not only to those heavenly beings who are our superiors, but also to those sacred men among us who are distinguished for their love of God."

37. Ibid.

38. *De divinis nominibus*, II.11, 649C.

does not imply any sort of multiplication. In support of this, Dionysius quotes his role model and spiritual teacher, St. Paul, and his words from the First Epistle to Corinthians: "For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist."[39] As a matter of fact, our author never misses a chance to reaffirm God's absolute difference from creation, and as well the impossibility of a real likeness between beings on different levels:

> Now while God is called "same" to indicate that he is totally, uniquely, and undividedly like himself, he is also described as "similar"; and this is a divine name which we must not reject. The theologians say that the transcendent God is inherently similar to no other being, but that he also bestows a similarity to himself [ὁμοιότητα θείαν] on all those who are returning to him in imitation as far as possible [κατὰ δύναμιν μιμήσει], of what is beyond all definition and understanding. It is the power of the divine similarity [θείας ὁμοιότητος δύναμις] which returns all created things toward their Cause, and these things must be reckoned to be similar to God by reason of the divine image and likeness [κατὰ θείαν εἰκόνα καὶ ὁμοίωσιν]. But we cannot say that God is similar to them, any more than we can say that man is similar to his own portrait. Things on the same level may be similar to one another with the result that similarity can be predicated of either of them.[40]

Here the theme of God as the model of imitation returns together with one of Dionysius's favorite expressions, κατὰ δύναμιν, that is, according to one's potential. The result of the actualization of this potential is attaining the likeness to God,[41] within the process of returning to the Cause. However, this likeness is never complete or perfect, since God and his creation are on completely different levels of being, and due to the ontological abyss between them, the only likeness that can be achieved is the one between a man and his own portrait.

In one of his letters, Dionysius summarizes his understanding of the character of deification and its relation to God as its source:

39. 1 Cor 8:5, cited in *De divinis nominibus*, II.11, 649D.

40. *De divinis nominibus*, IX.6, 913C. It is interesting to point out the distinction between sameness and similarity in Aristotle, who considers similarity as sharing accidental attributes, while sameness means sharing substance attributes (see, for example, *Metaphysica*, 1018A, 1021A). Such distinction might have helped Dionysius and other Christian authors to preserve God's transcendence, while still claiming the possibility of man being deified, that is, becoming like God in every respect, except in essence.

41. It is significant to point out that it is in this passage that the concept of "image and likeness" appears for the first and only time.

How could it be that he who surpasses everything also transcends the source of divinity, transcends the source of all goodness? This is possible if by divinity and goodness you mean the substance of that gift which makes [us] good and divine [ἀγαθοποιοῦ καὶ θεοποιοῦ] and if you mean the inimitable imitation of him who is beyond divinity and beyond goodness, by means of which we are made divine and made good [καθ᾽ ὃ θεούμεθα καὶ ἀγαθυνόμεθα]. Now if this is the source of becoming divine and good [θεοῦσθαι καὶ ἀγαθύνεσθαι] of all those made divine and good, then he who transcends every source, including the divinity and goodness [θεότητος καὶ ἀγαθότητος] spoken of here, surpasses the source of divinity and of goodness. To the extent that he remains inimitable [ἀμίμητος] and ungraspable [unrelated, ἄσχετος] he transcends all imitation and all grasping, as well as all who are imitated or participate [μιμουμένων καὶ μετεχόντων].[42]

Deification, therefore, consists in becoming good, imitating God, and participating in him. Ideas of imitating God (μίμησις), attaining God's likeness (ὁμοίωσις), and participation (μέθεξις), are present in Plato as well, and they seem to be synonymous.[43] However, in Dionysius, God transcends all this, since he is absolutely transcendent. But, in accordance with his activities, we participate in his attributes, and so to be deified means to participate in Deity, and to be good means to participate in Good. However, the transcendent God remains ultimately beyond all imitation and retention.[44]

Ecclesiology

In the overall structure of Dionysius's works it seems that the deification theme recurs most frequently in his treatises on hierarchies, namely in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, where he develops his special kind of ecclesiology, and categorizes different ranks of human beings. This is not surprising if one bears in mind the nature of the hierarchy which the Areopagite defines as "a sacred order [τάξις], a state of understanding [ἐπιστήμη], and an activity [ἐνέργεια] approximating [ἀφομοιουμένη] as closely as possible to the

42. Dionysius, *Epistula* II, 1068A–1069A.

43. See, for example, Plato, *Phaedr*us, 253A: "as they reach and grasp him by memory, they are inspired and receive from him character and habits, so far as it is possible for a man to have part in God [μετασχεῖν]. Now they consider the beloved the cause of all this, so they love him more than before, and if they draw the waters of their inspiration from Zeus, like the bacchantes, they pour it out upon the beloved and make him, so far as possible, like [ὁμοιότατον] their god." Or *Parmenides*, 132D: "I think the most likely view is, that these ideas exist in nature as patterns, and the other things resemble them and are imitations [ὁμοιώματα] of them; their participation [μέθεξις] in ideas is assimilation to them, that and nothing else."

44. Cf. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 249.

divine."[45] By connecting this definition with the claim, from the beginning of this chapter, that "divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God,"[46] it becomes clear that Dionysius sees hierarchy as the vehicle of attaining the likeness of God, that is, of deification, or, to be more precise, he puts deification in the framework of the Church.

It should have become evident by now that God is the source of deification, which he grants as an expression of his generosity and goodness. For this purpose he instituted the hierarchy "as a gift to ensure the salvation and divinization [σωτηρίᾳ καὶ θεώσει] of every being endowed with reason and intelligence."[47] As Roques has pointed out, the word ἀφομοίωσις appears only in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and *The Celestial Hierarchy*—it is not to be found in Dionysius's other works, which leads to the conclusion that in the author's eyes there can be no assimilation to God and deification outside the hierarchical arrangement of the world.[48] This is quite expected from someone, such as Dionysius, who is a thinker of order and is considered to be the very originator of the word "hierarchy" itself.

In addition, if the hierarchy is an order, an understanding, and an activity, then it follows that deification is to be operated through order, understanding, and activity. I shall now discuss the significance of order and activity, while understanding will be the subject of the next section.

Hierarchy and Order

Order is the proper arrangement of the cosmos, which is organized by the transcendent harmony. In this way the cosmos becomes well-ordered, through the providential character of the divine harmony which "looked after each being endowed with reason and intelligence and has ensured that they are rightly ordered [ἱερᾶς εὐκοσμίας] and sacredly uplifted."[49] The sacred εὐκοσμία means the arrangement of hierarchical ranks in a way suitable to each of them and in accordance with the degree of their participation in the divine.[50] A well-ordered cosmos contains no disharmony, inequality, or disproportion,[51] because it has been arranged through the hierarchies, whose source is the Trinity,[52] that is, God himself as the orig-

45. *De coelesti hierarchia*, III.1, 164D.
46. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.3, 376A.
47. Ibid. I.3, 376B.
48. See Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 92.
49. *De coelesti hierarchia*, X.2, 273A.
50. See ibid., X.2, 273B.
51. See *De divinis nominibus*, XII.3, 969C.
52. See *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.3, 373C.

inator of the splendid arrangement (ἀρίστη διάταξις)[53] and of every order.

This well-ordered cosmos functions through two hierarchies—celestial and ecclesiastical, the former concerning heavenly beings, and the latter consisting of earthly beings, more properly called "our" hierarchy, as Dionysius himself calls it.[54] The hierarchy's task is to minister the mystery of the enlightenment through its orders, and it is "likened toward its own source as much as permitted."[55] For each member of the hierarchy, the highest perfection stands in being uplifted "to imitate God as far as possible."[56] All this is worked out through the mediation of light, operated through the hierarchy:

> The goal of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him [ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἕνωσις]. A hierarchy has God as its leader of all understanding and action [ἱερᾶς ἐπιστήμης τε καὶ ἐνεργείας]. It is forever looking directly at the comeliness of God. A hierarchy bears in itself the mark of God. Hierarchy causes its members to be images [ἀγάλματα] of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself. It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendor they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God's will [κατὰ τοὺς θεαρχικοὺς θεσμούς][57] to beings further down the scale.[58]

This transmittance of divine light through the hierarchy is linked to another important triad, namely that of purification, illumination, and perfection. This threefold movement, which purifies, illumines, and perfects, is distributed through the different ranks of the hierarchy, so that the lowest order of each rank purifies or is being purified, the middle order illumines or is being illumined, and the highest order perfects or is guided to perfection. This happens because of God's law which prescribed that

53. *De divinis nominibus*, III.3, 684C.

54. It should be noted that celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies are not the only hierarchies. As a matter of fact, there was the hierarchy of the Law, which existed in the time of the Old Testament and to which Moses belonged, who received the Law from God himself in order to guide human beings. This hierarchy used "obscured imagery" and "palest copies of originals," and employed enigmas and extremely difficult symbolism (*De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, V.1.2, 501C). The ecclesiastical hierarchy, on the other hand, came with the New Testament, and it is halfway between the hierarchy of the Law and the celestial hierarchy, because with the one it shares understanding of contemplation, while with the other it has in common the usage of symbols which uplift to the divine (ibid., V.1.2, 501D).

55. *De coelesti hierarchia*, III.2, 165B.

56. Ibid.

57. On the significance of θεσμός in relation to νόμος, and their importance for the hierarchy, see Ronald F. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the "Letters" of Pseudo-Dionysius: A Study in the Form and Meaning of the Pseudo-Dionysian Writings* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969), 38–46.

58. *De coelesti hierarchia*, III.2, 165A.

"in every hierarchy appropriate order and power must be distributed within the primary, middle, and lowest strata, and those closer to God should be the initiators of those less close by guiding them to the divine access, enlightenment, and communion [θείαν προσαγωγὴν καὶ ἔλλαμψιν καὶ κοινωνίαν]."[59] The first rank is led to perfection directly by God, while other ranks are initiated by their superiors. Therefore, seraphim are the source of light, cherubim pass it on and thrones receive it, and then they become the source of purification, illumination, and perfection for the middle rank, in the sense that the middle rank achieves purification, illumination, and perfection "at second hand from the divine enlightenments by way of the first hierarchical rank, and passed on secondarily through that mediating rank."[60] The same repeats for other ranks and orders, through the same relationship between superiors and inferiors. In every rank higher orders contain all the illuminations and powers of inferior orders, while the lower orders possess none of those contained in the superiors.[61] The three stages, purgative, illuminative, and perfective, are the stages of deification, through which creation ascends to God in order to be finally united with him, and since the members of the hierarchies purify, illumine, and perfect, while being purified, illumined, and perfected at the same time, then the hierarchy becomes a "community that is being saved and mediates salvation."[62]

The angelic hierarchy precedes the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the latter bears resemblance to the former. The celestial hierarchy consists of three ranks of three orders of being, which are: seraphim, cherubim, thrones (first rank); dominions, powers, authorities (second rank), and principalities, archangels, angels (third rank). A reflection of the heavenly hierarchy is our hierarchy, but they are both instituted for the sake of our deification:

> The source of spiritual perfection provided us with perceptible images of these heavenly minds. He did so out of concern for us and because he wanted us to be made godlike[63] [ἡμῶν ἀναλόγου θεώσεως]. He made the heavenly hierarchies known to us. He made our own hierarchy a ministerial colleague of these divine hierarchies by an assimilation, to the extent that is humanly feasible [πρὸς δύναμιν ἡμῶν], to their godlike [θεοειδοῦς] priesthood. He revealed all this to us in the sacred pictures of the Scriptures so that he might lift us in spirit up through the

59. Ibid., IV.3, 181A.
60. Ibid., VIII.1, 240B.
61. See ibid., V, 196B.
62. Louth, *Denys*, 41.
63. Or better "for the sake of our proportionate deification."

perceptible [αἰσθητῶν] to the conceptual [νοητὰ], from sacred shapes and symbols to the simple peaks of the hierarchies of heaven.[64]

The earthly hierarchy is thereby the image and reflection of the celestial hierarchy, so that the latter is the model for the former. While the celestial hierarchy is purely noetic, the ecclesiastical one is clothed in perceptible, material symbols without which our nature would not be able to grasp the divine revelation and be uplifted to the gift of deification.[65] The ecclesiastical hierarchy is summarized by Dionysius as follows:

> The holy sacraments bring about purification, illumination, and perfection. The deacons form the order which purifies. The priests constitute the order which gives illumination. And the hierarchs, living in conformity with God, make up the order which perfects. As for those who are being purified, so long as they are still at this stage of purification they do not partake of the sacred vision or communion. The sacred people is the contemplative order. The order of those made perfect is that of the monks who live a single-minded life. Thus, our own hierarchy is blessedly and harmoniously divided into orders in accordance with divine revelation and therefore deploys the same sequence as the hierarchies of heaven. It carefully preserves in its own human way the characteristics which enable it to be like God and conform to him.[66]

The ecclesiastical hierarchy is therefore an image of the divine hierarchy. However, as Dionysius points out, there are some differences; for instance, one could not say that there are heavenly ranks that need purification, as it happens with our hierarchy—if one dared to say that, it would mean he had "lost all sense of the sacred."[67] And yet, there is the enlightenment that reveals to inferior beings what was hitherto unknown to them—this is something that corresponds to purification. This enlightenment perfects their understanding of divine knowledge. Another similarity between the two hierarchies is to be noted: "The highest and most divine beings have the task, in proportion to the heavenly hierarchy, of purifying from all ignorance those heavenly ranks inferior to them, of bestowing upon them the fullness of divine enlightenments, and, finally, of perfecting them in the most luminous understanding of divine conceptions."[68] God enlightens

64. *De coelesti hierarchia*, I.3, 124A.

65. See *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.2, 373B.

66. Ibid., VI.3.5, 536D–537A.

67. Ibid., VI.3.6, 537A. Purification in angels rather means a process that brings them to a more perfect understanding of divine knowledge, that is, it "purifies them from their ignorance of truths previously not understood" (ibid., VI.3.6, 537B).

68. Ibid., VI.3.6, 537BC.

the primary ranks through whose mediation the subordinate ranks receive an indirect enlightenment, in proportion to their capacity.

The two hierarchies reflect the tension between God as absolutely transcendent and God as permanently immanent in the world. This contrast between the Deity's characteristics happens because of our imperfect nature, and so the manifestation of God through material, perceptible objects represents a concession to our state. Here stands the difference between celestial beings and human beings: "The heavenly beings, because of their intelligence, have their own permitted conceptions of God. For us, on the other hand, it is by way of perceptible images that we are uplifted as far as we can be to the contemplation of what is divine."[69] Such is also the difference between the two hierarchies, in that the celestial dwells in the realm of the conceptual, while "our" hierarchy belongs to the realm of the perceptible. The purpose, therefore, of the human hierarchy is to serve as a vehicle which will allow us to grasp the manifestations of God and to operate the uplifting and deification.

The hierarchs, "using images derived from the senses, spoke of the transcendent," and "of necessity they made human what is divine."[70] In their initiations "they brought the transcendent down to our level."[71] The first hierarchs received this gift from God, and they led others to this same gift, because "like gods, they had a burning and generous urge to secure uplifting and divinization [ἀναγωγῆς καὶ θεώσεως] for their subordinates."[72] The first important thing to note here is that the first hierarchs, that is, apostles received the gift of deification directly from God. This seems to have been necessary in order to institute the human hierarchy—Christ revealed to his disciples what they would later on impart to their subordinates. Secondly, the hierarchy exists in a continuous chain of successions, in which hierarchs initiate their successors, and then they initiate their own successors, and so on. In this way the hierarch becomes the fulfilment and completion of the human hierarchy as he is "the first of those who behold God,"[73] but also the last—in the downward movement the order of hierarchs is the first to receive deification, while in the upward movement this order is the last since in it every individual hierarchy reaches its term, just as all hierarchies have their term in Christ.[74]

69. Ibid., I.2, 373B.
70. Ibid., I.5, 376D.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid., V.1.5, 505A.
74. See ibid., V.1.5, 505B. Cf. ibid., I.2, 372C–373A: "Nevertheless, it is still necessary to discuss

It is clear that, in Dionysius's structure of the earthly world, the hierarch has the central role. This should not be surprising if one has in mind the actual Church organization, which seems to be clearly expressed in our author's ideas. The hierarchy is headed by Jesus, who is in heaven, and therefore it is led on earth by his representatives, bishops, who represent the fullness of the Church; and it is common in Orthodoxy to call a Church without its hierarch a "widow." In *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the bishops are defined as "priests and prophets, and princes and leaders and kings, and mediators between God and the faithful, and receivers of the world, and preachers and proclaimers thereof, and knowers of the Scriptures and of the utterances of God, and witnesses of his will, who bear the sins of all, and are to give answers for all."[75]

A very similar definition of bishops is to be found in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, where they are called "ministers of the word, keepers of knowledge . . . , teachers of piety," etc.[76] The Areopagite, therefore, inserts himself in the quite long ecclesiological tradition in which episcopacy recurs as one of the most central themes, together with the well-known doctrine of apostolic succession as the main feature of a bishop's office.[77] All of these appellatives that describe bishops as guides, keepers of knowledge, ministers of the word, etc., are not granted to everyone who becomes a bishop, but the status of the hierarch has a very personal character. Only those touched by God's inspiration are worthy of being hierarchs: "If God's inspiration and choice have not summoned one to the task of leadership, if one has not yet received perfect and lasting divinization, one must avoid the arrogance of guiding others."[78]

The hierarchical structure and the preservation of the well-ordered world seem to be one of Dionysius's greatest preoccupations. The ordering

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how that hierarchy and every hierarchy, including the one being praised by us now, has one and the same power throughout all its hierarchical endeavor, namely the hierarch himself, and how its being and proportion and order are in him divinely perfected and deified, and are then imparted to those below him according to their merit, whereas the sacred deification occurs in him directly from God."

75. *Didascalia Apostolorum*, trans. R. H. Connolly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), VIII.80.

76. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, trans. James Donaldson (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature, 1886), II.26.

77. This power and authority of bishops is, according to Dionysius, tempered only by the hierarch's deference to the apostles and their first successors. Again, the profound Christian character of Dionysius's ecclesiology is shown here. The history of the Church is at the same time a history of the apostolic succession. This succession, in the Orthodox sense, means receiving, transmitting, and keeping, by clergy and people, one and the same faith and spiritual life. A hierarchy that fails to transmit the apostolic faith and life is no longer a hierarchy. See Filip Ivanovic, "The Ecclesiology of Dionysius the Areopagite," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 1 (2011): 27–44.

78. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.3.14, 445B.

of the cosmos has been instituted by God himself, and every transgression against that arrangement would mean disobeying God's commandments. This is clearly expressed in the famous *Letter VIII* which Dionysius allegedly wrote to a certain monk Demophilus. The letter is a response to the monk who has asked Dionysius's opinion on something he did: specifically, a priest in his community had taken pity on a penitent, and according to the monk he had thus made a mistake, so the monk intervened to dismiss the priest, and had entered the inner sanctuary in order to save the sacred items from defilement. Given the exposition of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and the explicit prohibition of monks entering the inner sanctuary, Demophilus obviously could not earn Dionysius's approval. Strictly following his concept of the hierarchy, the Areopagite explains that "it is not permitted that a priest should be corrected by the deacons, who are your superiors, nor by the monks, who are at the same level as yourself," because nothing gives one the right "to overturn the order which God himself has established."[79]

Since monks belonged to the highest rank of the lowest order of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, it was not permitted for them to reproach those who were on higher levels; furthermore, Demophilus did not reproach a deacon, who was immediately superior to him, but rather a priest, who was inferior only to the hierarch. Therefore, Demophilus violated the sacred order and did not respect his "proper place." This place is significantly described by Dionysius in an image of the position of various ranks in the church:

> Not every participant is removed from the Holy of Holies? No. First to approach it is the rank of sacred initiators [hierarchs]. Then come the priests and the deacons. The monks have their rightful place at the doors of the inner sanctuary. The position of the [clergy] at the divine altar symbolizes the rank they hold. . . . To the obedient monks, to the sacred people, to the orders being purified, they make known, according to merit, those divine things which were safe for all contamination until the Holy of Holies was compelled to endure your arrogant invasion.[80]

The "arrogant invasion" means transgression against the divinely ordered cosmos, and moving away from one's own place in that cosmos represents a distortion of justice. In his exposition of the hierarchical discipline, Dionysius gives an account of justice that is very much reminiscent of the Platonic concept of justice: "The Word of God commands us 'to pursue just things justly,' and justice is pursued when each wishes to give every-

79. Dionysius, *Epistula* VIII.1, 1088C.
80. Ibid., VIII.1, 1088D–1089C.

one his due."[81] And as for Demophilus, he should put himself in his proper place: "Accept the place assigned to you by the divine deacons. Let them accept what the priests have assigned to them. Let the priests accept what the hierarchs have assigned to them. Let the hierarchs bow to the apostles and to the successors of apostles."[82]

It is once again clear what constitutes Dionysius's position on hierarchical relationships within the Church: the only (human) authority above the hierarchs are the apostles and their successors, while all the other ranks should accept the assignments given by the orders superior to them. This led René Roques to note that "to suppress or just to neglect these relations means, in Dionysius's eyes, to deliver the angelic and ecclesiastical world to confusion, ignorance, and wreck."[83]

Sacraments

The importance of the central role of a bishop is repeated several times in Dionysius's treatment of the hierarchy; without bishops there would be no hierarchy, as only they possess the power of consecration, without which other sacraments would not be possible, and even a priest would not be a priest without first being consecrated by the hierarch. This confirms that a hierarch's primacy is not based just on the idea that he belongs to the first rank in the hierarchy, closest to God, but also in the fact that without him, the sacraments could not be performed. And it is precisely in the sacraments that Dionysius sees the main instrument of deification, as every single sacrament "draws our fragmented lives together into a one-like divinization [ἑνοειδῆ θέωσιν]."[84] God himself "has established for us those saving sacraments by means of which the participants are divinized."[85]

God has arranged that only hierarchs "can accomplish the sanctification of the clerical orders, the consecration of the ointment, and the rite of consecrating the holy altar."[86] As far as priests are concerned, they guide "the initiates to the divine visions of sacraments,"[87] show the works of God in appropriate sacred symbols and prepare the postulants "to contemplate and participate in the holy sacraments."[88] The order of deacons

81. Ibid., VIII.3, 1092CD.
82. Ibid., VIII.4, 1093C.
83. Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 88–89.
84. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.1, 424C.
85. Ibid., III.3.7, 436C.
86. Ibid., V.1.5, 505C.
87. Ibid., V.1.6, 505D.
88. Ibid.

has the power of purification: "The order of deacons purifies and discerns those who do not carry God's likeness within themselves, and it does so before they come to the sacred rites performed by the priests. It purifies all who approach by drawing them away from all dalliance with what is evil. It makes them receptive to the ritual vision and communion."[89]

All this is not just the result of some obsession of Dionysius with statically ordered and strict arrangement with an elitist significance, but it is a necessary prerequisite which makes deification and godlikeness possible. Differences among orders are in fact symbols of divine activities, and "since they bestow enlightenment corresponding to the unconfused and pure order of these activities, their sacred activities and holy orders have been arranged hierarchically in the threefold division of first, middle, and last so as to present, as I have said already, an image of the ordered and harmonious nature of the divine activities."[90] The activities purify, illuminate, and perfect, and this too is well-ordered and rightly adjusted:

> The divinity first purifies those minds which it reaches and then illuminates them. Following on their illumination it perfects them in a perfect conformity to God. This being so, it is clear that the hierarchy, as an image of the divine, is divided into distinctive orders and powers in order to reveal that the activities of the divinity are preeminent for the utter holiness and purity, permanence and distinctiveness of their orders.[91]

Therefore, a sacramental power is assigned to each order of the clerical rank. However, this does not mean that each order has only one power; the superior orders hold the powers of subordinates, so deacons just purify, priests purify and illuminate, while hierarchs purify, illuminate, and perfect.[92] These three powers operate through particular sacraments, so that "the sacred divine birth is a purification and an illuminating enlightenment, the sacraments of the synaxis and of the myron-ointment provide a perfecting knowledge and understanding of the divine workings."[93] The "divine birth," that is, baptism is, therefore, a purification, a first step toward deification, and the starting point of the journey on which one becomes receptive to the work of God. Ultimately, baptism brings one to a divine level of being (τὸ εἶναι θείως ἐστὶν ἡ θεία γέννησις),[94] since without

89. Ibid., V.1.6, 508A.
90. Ibid., V.1.7, 508CD.
91. Ibid., V.1.7, 508C–509A.
92. See ibid.
93. Ibid., V.1.3, 504C.
94. See ibid., II.1, 392B.

the divine birth, deification would never be realized, as the understanding and practicing of the truths of God would be impossible without "a divine beginning."[95] The need for baptism comes from the initiate himself, whose heart becomes fired with the desire of sharing in the transcendent, as he has heard the "good news," spoken through the hierarch, that God "has deigned to come down to us and that, like a fire, he has made one with himself all those capable of being divinized [πρὸς θέωσιν ἐπιτηδειότητα]."[96] Dionysius reaffirms once again God's interest in our salvation, the reason for which he came to earth, out of love, and made it possible for human beings to be in union with him. In addition, the hierarch's importance is restated, as it is he who announces the "good news," in which he follows the footsteps of his predecessors, apostles, who were the first to proclaim God's incarnation. Finally, the Areopagite stresses the aptitude or fitness for deification, as well as the postulant's own initiative, which might be understood as the author's affirmation of the human will—it is dependent on the will to accept or reject the gift of deification.[97]

In his being uplifted, the postulant is granted a share of the divinity and so becomes part of those who are made godly (ἐνθέων) and who form a sacred ordering (ἱερᾶς κατατάξεως).[98] The "new birth" also means new life, and a new life presupposes ethical conduct, and the renouncement of evil, darkness, and every wrongdoing. Nevertheless, this is still not enough—conformity to God presupposes courage too, as one "must fearlessly confront any disastrous backsliding,"[99] and he "will do battle with every activity and with every being which stand in the way of his divinization [θέωσιν]."[100] The courage to do battle with everything opposed to deification highlights again not only the individual ability to gain deification, but also the importance of one's own will—it is not enough to be baptized, or to withdraw from wrongdoing, it is also necessary to have the will to fight and to follow Christ's example. Clearly, deification is not simply a given, it is not bestowed upon a passive believer, but it requires certain activeness,[101] a synergy with God, by which this gift is earned.

The culmination of each rite is the Eucharist, the highest point that

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid., II.2.1, 393A.

97. See Andia, *Henosis*, 290.

98. See *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, II.3.4, 400D.

99. Ibid., II.3.5, 401C.

100. Ibid., II.3.6, 404A. In this way he will die to sin in baptism and share in the death of Christ.

101. This idea of both intellectual and practical activity in the process of attaining godlikeness is also present in Plato. See Rutenber, *Doctrine of the Imitation*, 87–107.

grants union with God, brings about gathering to the One, and perfects one's communion with God: "Each of the hierarchic sacraments is incomplete to the extent that it does not perfect our communion and 'gathering' to the One [πρὸς τὸ ἓν ἡμῶν κοινωνίαν καὶ σύναξιν], and by being thus incomplete it cannot work our full perfection."[102] It seems that, for Dionysius, a triple union is realized through the Eucharist—union with God, union with oneself, and union with other members of the community. The purpose of the Eucharist is precisely the union with God, but this cannot be achieved without the union with oneself, that is, without being ἑνοειδής, which implies the purification of sins and of inclinations toward change and multiplicity of passions.[103] In the end, the Eucharist represents the community of believers who are nourished by the same food, and so "their lives must be joined in full sharing of inspired food."[104] In this way, the σύναξις becomes an assembly of believers, and is realized through a "material gathering of a plurality which is united also spiritually."[105]

The Eucharist is, therefore, "the sacrament of sacraments," and only baptized Christians can be present during its performance, while the catechumens, those not initiated, are barred from this sacrament. The initiation has a huge importance for Dionysius, and when discussing the difference between the catechumens and those possessed, he says that "there is no equality of status between someone who has received no initiation nor taken part in the divine sacraments and someone who has taken part in some of the sacred rites but is now held fast by opposing charms or by confusion."[106] Again the initiation is reaffirmed as the necessary starting point for communion with God, and so those not initiated are not allowed to be present. Barred also are the possessed, who are somewhat superior to catechumens and who have received baptism, but they "have turned away from a life conforming to the divine example,"[107] which does not allow them to be present during the Eucharist. Once again Dionysius shows the double condition of deification—the first, formal condition is to be baptized, that is, initiated, while the second condition stands in the way of life which must conform to the divine example, and only such life can truly provide the stability and activity of the godlike state.[108] This includes piety, ethics,

102. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.1, 424D–425A.
103. See ibid., III.3.7, 433D.
104. Ibid., III.3.1, 428B.
105. Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 259.
106. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.3.7, 433B.
107. Ibid., III.3.7, 433D.
108. See ibid., III.3.7, 436B.

and asceticism, as the Areopagite claims that the one who "has been lifted up into conformity with God [θεοειδοῦς] through complete and perfecting divinization (παντελέσι καὶ τελειωτικαῖς θεώσεσιν], such as man if he is truly indifferent to the realities of the flesh, will have arrived at the highest possible measure of divinization [θωσει]."[109] The Eucharist in fact represents and manifests the salvific workings of Christ, who becomes visible before our eyes; and by observing and receiving the Eucharist, human beings are able to become godlike: "If our longing is for communion with him, then we must give our full attention to his divine life in the flesh. His sacred sinlessness must be our model so that we may aspire to a godlike and unblemished condition [θεοειδῆ καὶ ἀλώβητον ἕξιν]. This is how, in a way that suits us [harmoniously, ἐναρμονίως], he will grant us communion with his likeness [ὅμοιον κοινωνίαν]."[110] His example, manifested by communion, is the calling to share in his goodness, and to "make ourselves one with his divine life and imitate it as far as we can, so that we may achieve perfection and truly enter into communion with God [κοινωνοὶ θεοῦ] and with the divine things."[111] The moral life which follows Christ's example is complementary to the participation in the Eucharist.[112] Deification is operated through the sacraments and departs from Christ, who is the head of the entire hierarchy and whose workings are manifested through the sacraments.[113]

The third sacrament, Ointment, belongs to the same perfecting order as the Eucharist, and in the same manner it cannot be assisted by the imperfect orders. The ointment used in the sacrament has a symbolic value, in that it is composed of fragrant substances, whose source, in a figurative way, is Christ, and he "turns to those minds which have achieved the closest conformity to God."[114] In doing so, he gives them divine fragrances to instigate "a longing for God's gifts, and to feed on conceptual food."[115] These fragrant outpourings are also granted according to one's capacity to receive them, that is, "in proportion to whatever part it has in the divine [κατὰ θείαν μέθεξιν]."[116] The myron represents Christ's action on behalf of the salvation of human

109. Ibid., III.3.7, 433C.
110. Ibid., III.3.12, 444B.
111. Ibid.
112. This participation is proportionate to one's position in the hierarchy, as "all the sacred orders, as they are uplifted and are more or less made godlike, have a proportionate share in the divine gift of this communion [κοινωνικῆς καὶ θειοτάτης δωρεᾶς]" (ibid., VI.3.5, 536C).
113. See Andia, *Henosis*, 292; Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 255.
114. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, IV.3.4, 480A.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid.

beings,[117] and it also symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit.[118] In fact, ointment is necessary for the consecration of everything that requires consecration, and so completes the sacrament of baptism, as the dropping of the ointment into the baptistery signifies that Christ died for the sake of our divine birth.[119] All of this points to the conclusion that Christ's philanthropy (and incarnation as its result) is the principle of deification, while its vehicle, through which deification is operated, is the sacraments that are performed within the Church.[120]

Epistemology

As noted in the previous section, the hierarchy, which brings about deification, is defined as an order, an activity, and a state of understanding [ἐπιστήμη]. The orders of the hierarchy have the task of performing the sacraments, while sacramental activities consist of purification, illumination, and perfection. These three activities contain an important epistemological element, since, as Dionysius says, these "are all three the reception of an understanding of the Godhead [θεαρχικῆς ἐπιστήμης]."[121] Moreover, the common goal of the hierarchy is the "seeing and understanding of sacred truth [ἡ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἀληθείας ὅρασίς τε καὶ ἐπιστήμη]," [122] which ultimately effects deification. Therefore, knowledge constitutes an important part in the process of the deification of human beings. Nonetheless, how is this process of knowing operated? There is a difference of epistemological states between the two hierarchies. The knowledge of God is first participated by incorporeal beings, angels, whose thinking processes imitate the divine.[123] And then, this knowledge is communicated to human beings, so that it was first revealed to angels, and then from them to human beings.

This knowledge is transmitted to human beings by the first rank of their hierarchy, since it comes from God to the leaders, the apostles and hierarchs, of the human order: "The first leaders of our hierarchy received their

117. See ibid., IV.3.12, 485A.

118. See ibid., IV.3.11, 484C.

119. See ibid., IV.3.10, 484B.

120. This is consistent with the entire Christian tradition, although, as Andia notes, Dionysius prefers the philosophical vocabulary of Neoplatonism in order to express the Christian mystery, and so incarnation is φιλανθρωπία, sacraments are θεουργία, and θέωσις is more used than θεοποίησις to describe deification (Andia, *Henosis*, 300).

121. *De coelesti hierarchia*, VII.3, 209C.

122. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.3, 376A.

123. See *De divinis nominibus*, VII.1, 868B; *De coelesti hierarchia*, IV.2, 180A; VII.2, 208C; XV.6, 336B.

fill of the sacred gift from the transcendent Deity. Then divine goodness sent them to lead others to this same gift. Like gods, they had a burning and generous urge to secure uplifting and divinization for their subordinates. And so, using images derived from the senses they spoke of the transcendent."[124]

In this process of knowing, the knower becomes more and more united with God, since it is him who the knower is trying to know. The direct participation of the knower with the realities of God is brought about by the epistemological identification of the process of knowing with the object of knowing.[125] The reality of God becomes the reality of the knower, which means that God lives through him, and he thus becomes deified. In Dionysius's words, "through the knowledge we have, which is geared to our faculties [proportionate knowledge, ἀναλογικῆς γνώσεως], we may be uplifted as far as possible to the Cause of everything."[126]

The question now is, if God is ineffable and unknowable, how is the knowledge of God possible and how can it be reached? There are two ways—the famous cataphatic and apophatic theologies, to which symbolic theology should be added. These two methods of knowing God are grounded in Dionysius's idea of unions and distinctions in God, according to which the divine unities are "the hidden and permanent, supreme foundations of a steadfastness which is more than ineffable and more than unknowable," while the divine distinctions are "the benign processions and revelation of God."[127] The cataphatic theology manifests the creative production of God, it is the movement from simplicity to multiplicity, while the apophatic theology represents the ascent of being, and the passage from diversity to multiplicity. The relationship between these is perhaps best explained by Dionysius himself:

In my *Theological Representations*, I have praised the notions which are most appropriate to affirmative theology. I have shown the sense in which the divine and good nature is said to be one and then triune, how Fatherhood and Sonship are predicated of it, the meaning of the theology of the Spirit, how these core lights of goodness grew from the incorporeal and indivisible good, and how in this sprouting they have remained inseparable from their co-eternal foundation in it, in themselves, and in each other. I have spoken of how Jesus, who is above individual being, became a being with a true human nature. Other revelations of Scripture were

124. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.5, 376D.
125. Cf. *De divinis nominibus*, VII.4, 872D.
126. Ibid., V.9, 825A.
127. Ibid., II.4, 640D.

also praised in *The Theological Representations.* In *The Divine Names* I have shown the sense in which God is described as good, existent, life, wisdom, power, and whatever other things pertain to the conceptual names for God. In my *Symbolic Theology* I have discussed analogies of God drawn from what we perceive. I have spoken of the images we have of him, of the forms, figures, and instruments proper to him, of the places in which he lives, and of the ornaments he wears. I have spoken of his anger, grief, and rage, of how he is said to be drunk and hungover, of his oaths and curses, of his sleeping and waking, and indeed of all those images we have of him, images shaped by the workings of the symbolic representations of God. And I feel sure that you have noticed how these latter come much more abundantly than what went before, since *The Theological Representations* and a discussion of the names appropriate to God are inevitably briefer than what can be said in *The Symbolic Theology*.

However, when the mind ascends, it realizes that words become useless and cannot denote the one who is ineffable and indescribable:

The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing. In the earlier books my argument traveled downward from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied with every stage of the descent. But my argument now rises from what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.[128]

Cataphatic theology proceeds by affirmation, by saying what God is, while the apophatic approach consists of negation, in saying what God is not. These two should be considered as complementary, in the sense that cataphatic theology is the beginning, while its apophatic counterpart is the final stage of the epistemological process. God is known through "the arrangement of everything, because everything is, in a sense, projected out of him, and this order possesses certain images and semblances of his divine paradigms."[129] This includes perceptible images, symbols, and sacramental

128. *De mystica theologia* III, 1032D–1033C.

129. *De divinis nominibus*, VII.3, 869D. It would be useful to quote the passage in its entirety: "If God cannot be grasped by mind or sense-perception, if he is not a particular being, how do we know him? This is something we must inquire into. It might be more accurate to say that we cannot know God in his nature, since this is unknowable and is beyond the reach of mind or of reason. But we know him from the arrangement of everything, because everything is, in a sense, projected out from him, and this order possesses certain images and semblances of his divine paradigms. We therefore

activities, through which human beings are uplifted to the contemplation of divine things.[130] In Dionysius's words: "Holy contemplation can be derived from all things, and the above-named incongruous similitudes [divine attributes] can be fashioned from material things to symbolize what is intelligible and intellectual, since the intellectual has in another manner what has been attributed differently to the perceptible."[131]

There are, for Dionysius, two types of images and symbols: similar, where like represents the like, and dissimilar, which are incongruous and do not comply with the rule of likeness. Both of these, of course, are necessary, and represent a sort of a concession to our imperfect nature, which knows things through their perceptible character. Of these two types, the Areopagite prefers the dissimilar ones. The preference for dissimilar images is the result of two aspects, the first one being pedagogical, since it is more difficult to accept dissimilar symbols, as they require an explanation, provoke wonder, and incite further research, and the second being the need to hide the secret knowledge and sacred meaning of these symbols, so they cannot be grasped and thus desecrated by uninitiated people.[132] Thus Dionysius says:

> But if one looks at the truth of the matter, the sacred wisdom of Scripture becomes evident, for, when the heavenly intelligences are represented with forms, great providential care is taken to offer no insult to the divine powers, as one might say, and we ourselves are spared a passionate dependence upon images which have something of the lowly and the vulgar about them. Now there are two reasons for creating types for the typeless, for giving shape to what is actually without shape. First, we lack the ability to be directly raised up to conceptual contemplations. We need our own upliftings that come naturally to us and which can raise before us the permitted forms of the marvelous and unformed sights. Second, it is most fitting to the mysterious passages of Scripture that the sacred and hidden truth about the celestial intelligences be concealed through the inexpressible and the sacred and be inaccessible to *hoi polloi*.[133]

The visible world, therefore, has a double character, which at once reveals and conceals the divine. However, the most suitable way of knowing

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approach that which is beyond all as far as our capacities allow us and we pass by way of the denial and the transcendence of all things and by way of the cause of all things. God is therefore known in all things and as distinct from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing."

130. See *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.2, 373B.

131. *De coelesti hierarchia*, II.3, 141C.

132. On this theme, see Filip Ivanovic, "Vizuelni aspekt oboženja po Dionisiju Areopagitu," *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta: Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'études byzantines* 47 (2010): 39–54.

133. *De coelesti hierarchia*, II.2, 140AB.

divine things is apophatic theology, which is the final step in this process, as both cataphatic and symbolic theologies point beyond themselves to the way of negation. This means the denial of all beings, because in such a way we "discover that although [Godhead] is the cause of everything, it is not a thing since it transcends all things in a manner beyond being."[134] Therefore, the process of knowing is a combination of both affirmative and negative paths, and as the Areopagite says, "God is therefore known in all things and as distinct from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing."[135] In order to make any assertions about the One who is beyond assertion, it is necessary to look for the closest similitudes. However, as soon as any affirmation or cataphatic statement is conceived, it necessarily leads to gradual apophatic denial because no affirmation can depict the divine reality.[136] In this way God "is known to all from all things, and he is known to no one from anything."[137]

The goal of this apophatic path is to reach the divine darkness,[138] the cloud of unknowing, which is a union beyond mind, when the mind turns away from all things and even from itself. This means that when "we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing."[139] This darkness is not some darkness of ignorance, but rather something that surpasses knowledge and leaves us speechless, since taking the negative path means negating every affirmation; however, in the end, negation also is negated, and only silence remains, in a sort of a cessation of all physical and cognitive activities. This however does not mean an exaltation of some pure thought, but, as Andrew Louth pointed out, rather a "withdrawal from the inevitable fragmentariness of our involvement in the world of the senses to a more collected, unified state."[140] The divine darkness should not be confused with dark itself—it is not the absence of light, but quite the contrary, it is the superabundance of light. This is quite clear even from the terminology that Dionysius employs: dark as the absence of light is called σκότος, while darkness as superabundance of light is described as γνόφος. The terminology of dark/darkness is also related to the terminology of ig-

134. *De divinis nominibus*, I.5, 593BC.
135. Ibid., VII.3, 872A.
136. See Kharlamov, *Beauty of the Unity*, 195–96.
137. *De divinis nominibus*, VII.3, 872A.
138. Cf. Psalm 18:11, God "made darkness his secret place."
139. *De mystica theologia* III, 1033BC.
140. Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 168.

norance/unknowing, so that σκότος relates to ἄγνοια,[141] and γνόφος relates to ἀγνωσία. While ignorance is something inferior to knowledge, unknowing is something that goes beyond it, just as dark means the absence of light while darkness surpasses it. The real knowledge of God comes within a union of the mind, when one belongs only to God:

> The human mind has a capacity to think, through which it looks on conceptual things, and a unity which transcends the nature of the mind, through which it is joined to things beyond itself. And this transcendent characteristic must be given to the words we use about God. They must not be given the human sense. We should be taken wholly out of ourselves and become wholly of God, since it is better to belong to God rather than to ourselves. Only when we are with God will the divine gifts be poured out onto us.[142]

The union of the mind with transcendent things can happen only when one does not belong to oneself, but is possessed by God. In this union it is possible to think God and to be deified.[143] An example of this state, in Dionysius's eyes, is Moses who entered the divine darkness and from that moment belonged completely to God.[144]

As evident from above, knowledge of the "sacred truth" constitutes an essentially important part of the process of deification according to the Areopagite, leading Roques to claim that θέωσις "goes hand in hand with the γνῶσις."[145] This epistemological element in Dionysius is so strong that it is possible to deduce a tension between ontology and epistemology, a difference between "to be" and "to know," or even more strongly to say that no knowledge means no deification.[146] And indeed, Dionysius's insistence on the epistemological dimension of deification could lead to the conclusion that knowledge is the essential part, or a condition, of deification. Together with his constant affirmation that receiving knowledge stands in proportion to one's place in the hierarchy, this could lead to two striking con-

141. The Good as the light "clears away the fog of ignorance [ἀγνοίας ἀχλύος] from the eyes of the mind, and it stirs and unwraps those covered over by the burden of darkness [βάρει τοῦ σκότους]" (*De divinis nominibus*, IV.5, 700D).

142. *De divinis nominibus*, VII.1, 865D–868A.

143. See Andia, *Henosis*, 416–22.

144. See *De mystica theologia* I.3, 1000C–1001A. The state to which Dionysius refers is described thus: "Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing" (1001A). It is interesting to note that in *The Mystical Theology* the deification vocabulary does not occur.

145. Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 88.

146. See, for example, Keneth Paul Wesche, "Christological Doctrine and Liturgical Interpretation in Pseudo-Dionysius," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1989): 53–73; Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*; Kharlamov, *Beauty of the Unity*, esp. 192–93.

clusions: 1) only intelligent beings can be deified and only if they possess adequate knowledge, and 2) not all intelligent beings are equally deified since their knowledge depends on their capacities to receive it and on their position within the hierarchy. However, despite the apparent accuracy of these conclusions, some objections have to be made in this respect.

First, it is important to note that intellect should not be understood in the contemporary sense of the word but rather as the center and summation of all lesser functions, including both discursive reason and sense perception. Dionysius is precisely one of those who argue that we do not know only through our "noetic" function, but also through the senses: "But also sense-perceptions themselves are echoes of wisdom."[147] And here stands further "proof" of Dionysius's orthodoxy—we do not know God away or apart from senses, but precisely through them, and a human being is deified not only in his soul, but also in both his body and soul.[148] In the Areopagite's words:

> Among the unholy there are some who ridiculously believe that our bodies experience a dissolution of being. Others think that the link of body and soul is broken forever since, as they imagine, it would be inappropriate for souls to be trammeled with a body in the midst of the godlike life and blessedness. Such people, because of their inadequate acquaintance with divine understanding [ἐπιστήμη], overlook the fact that Christ has already provided the example of a human life conforming perfectly to God. . . . No sacred men will ever fall into such error, for they know that their whole being will be granted the peace which will make them Christlike.[149]

In relation to the apparent difference between ontology and epistemology, we should recall his words that the knower is united with the object of knowing, namely God, that is, knowledge is communion with God, and therefore it is constitutive of the very being of creatures, meaning that there can be no difference between "to be" and "to know." To know God is to be; to be is to know God, since the knowledge of God is attained "by way of the cause of all things."[150] The creation is the key to our understanding of the transcendent, while causality opens the path to divine reality.[151] Because

147. *De divinis nominibus*, VII.2, 868BC.

148. Specifically on this, see Alexander Golitzin, "'On the Other Hand': A Response to Fr Paul Wesche's Recent Article on Dionysius in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 34 (1990): 305–29.

149. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, VII.1.2, 553CD.

150. *De divinis nominibus*, VII.3, 872A.

151. See Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 7.

of the continuum of modes of communion that we have observed, this is true even for inanimate objects. Just as intellection is the mode of being attributable to intelligent beings, so we may say that simple sense-perception, vital motion, and essential fitness are the attenuated modes of knowledge proper to animals, plants, and stones respectively.[152] This means that not only human beings, but creation in its entirety, including inanimate beings, are called to be in communion with God, that is, to be deified:

> All things desire it: Everything with mind and reason seeks to know it, everything sentient yearns to perceive it, everything lacking perception has a living and instinctive longing for it, and everything lifeless and merely existent turns, in its own fashion, for a share of it.[153]

As Eric D. Perl has shown, in the same way that knowledge is the mode of being proper to cognitive things, so the being of things at lower levels is their lesser mode of knowledge. This means that the mere existence of a stone or any other inanimate object is that thing's analogous knowledge of God.[154] As the Areopagite says:

> Next to these sacred and holy intelligent beings are the souls, together with all the good peculiar to these souls. These too derive their being from the transcendent Good. So therefore they have intelligence, immortality, existence. They can strive toward angelic life. By means of the angels as good leaders, they can be uplifted to the generous Source of all good things and, each according to his measure, they are able to have a share in the illuminations streaming out from that Source. They too, in their own fashion, possess the gift of exemplifying the Good, and they have all those other qualities which I described in my book *The Soul*. And, if we must speak of the matter, all this applies also to the irrational souls, to the living creatures which fly through the air or walk the earth, those that live in the waters, the amphibians as well as those which are burrowed into the ground, in short, every sentient and living being. They all have soul and life because of the existence of the Good. And the plants too have nourishment and life and motion from this same Good. So also with soulless and lifeless matter. It is there because of the Good; through it they received their state of existence.[155]

152. See Eric D. Perl, "Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in Saint Dionysios the Areopagite," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39, nos. 3–4 (1994): 328.

153. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.4, 700B. Also I.5, 593D: "All things long for it. The intelligent and rational long for it by way of knowledge, the lower strata by way of perception, the remainder by way of the stirrings of being alive and in whatever fashion befits their condition."

154. See Perl, *Theophany*, 97.

155. *De divinis nominibus*, IV.2, 696CD.

Therefore, "if to produce is to reveal, then to be produced is to receive the revelation, that is, to know."[156] This means that being is actually both the manifestation and knowledge of God.

The second conclusion regarding the unequal deification of all beings, derived from their position in the hierarchy and their capacity, comes from Dionysius's insistence on precise hierarchical order, which offers the chance to accuse him of describing his hierarchy as too rigid and immutable. Thus, knowledge is mediated by Christ through hierarchies, so there is always something, namely the hierarchy, which stands between God and man. As such, the hierarchy would be the carrier of all true knowledge of creation, and a path to knowledge of God; it is the true φυσικὴ θεωρία.[157] From the hierarchical division into orders it follows that the higher orders will always be closer to the source, and therefore they would be more deified than the lower orders, so for example hierarchs (bishops) would always have more knowledge, and thus be more deified, than the common people. One should note here the parallel between Dionysius's hierarch and Plato's philosopher: the philosopher, as the one who possesses the virtue of knowledge, becomes more like God in the measure of his insight into the truth contained in God, while all other men are scaled proportionally to the degree to which they outline the being of the philosopher, and this scale seems to be quite hierarchically arranged.[158] Thus when the truth is known better, the imitation of God is greater.

Going back to Dionysius, what should be noted here is that there is no difference between so-called direct and mediated knowledge, or between direct and mediated deification. As a result, the communion with God which is hierarchically ordered and mediated is nothing but the same direct communion, since it is through and because of the hierarchies, that this communion is realized. Communion happens within the hierarchy, and each being is in communion precisely because it occupies a specific place in the hierarchical order. There are no two or three Gods for the various classes of initiates, but there is one God who gives himself in the way best suited to every recipient.[159] Dionysius himself proves this conclusion by saying:

A hierarchy bears in itself the mark of God. Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors. . . . It ensures that

156. Perl, *Theophany*, 97.
157. See Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 53.
158. See Plato, *Phaedr*us, 248DE.
159. See Spearritt, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 169.

when its members have received this full and divine splendor they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God's will to beings further down the scale.… Indeed for every member of the hierarchy, perfection consists in this, that it is uplifted to imitate God as far as possible and, more wonderful still, that it becomes what Scripture calls a "fellow workman for God" and a reflection of the workings of God. Therefore when the hierarchic order lays it on some to be purified and on others to do the purifying, on some to receive illumination and on others to cause illumination, on some to be perfected and on others to bring about perfection, each will actually imitate God in the way suitable to whatever role it has.[160]

Therefore, the goal and purpose of the hierarchy is to make its members images of God, and to ensure that all the members "have received this *full* and divine splendor." This also means that in the Areopagite's system there is no place for any kind of discrimination against the lower orders, since every thing has its perfection by being in the right and proper place in the hierarchy. And furthermore, God is not a being above or at the peak of the hierarchy; in fact, he is not a being, but he is the ground of the hierarchy and fully and directly penetrates the entire hierarchy throughout.[161] An important point to make here is that Dionysius does not affirm the emanation of being through hierarchies—it is not that the lower ranks receive their being from higher ranks. On the contrary, he firmly believes in the Christian idea of creation by God out of nothing, and so each being is immediate to God since God is its creator. This means that there is the integrity of divine processions on each level of participation, so the hierarchy does not limit in any way the fullness of union with God—it is fully realized on each step of the ladder, but it is not a uniform union; rather, it is personal.[162] Therefore, the hierarchy is a vehicle of light, illumination, and revelation, while the ranks are God's messengers, and nothing more.[163]

As already stated, Dionysius's thought is extremely heavy with symbolism and knowledge, symbols representing some kind of token for acquiring knowledge. The question that arises here is, therefore, what is the role of liturgy and sacraments? If the *gnosis* is the key element of deification, and it is transmitted by the hierarchy, then what is liturgy, except a mere symbol, or just "a divine drama"?[164] I would like to pose the same question as Alex-

160. *De coelesti hierarchia*, III.2, 165AB.

161. See Perl, "Symbol, Sacrament," 347–48.

162. See Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 41.

163. Cf. Louth, *Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 171.

164. See Wesche, "Christological Doctrine," 72.

ander Golitzin did in his defense of Dionysius against the aforementioned accusations: "What on earth—or heaven—[is] Dionysius finally talking about, and why [did he bother] to say it in the first place?"[165] Indeed, I think that the question is in order, if one assumes that following the path of all these accusations, Dionysius would be an incompetent, or, at best, a rather confused writer whose thought dissolves between some Christian elements mixed with Neoplatonic tradition which he himself has thoroughly changed. The answer lies in the negligent reading of his writings, rather than in his own incongruity and confusion. Rather than a drama, liturgy is a vehicle of deification, which "is a participation in the divine life, and the transmission of that divine life is operated by symbolic and hierarchical rites."[166]

The last objection that I would like to address here is the question as to whether there is some sacramental efficacy in the Areopagite's system, or is it just, as stated above, a symbol and some sort of a drama? Dionysius is very explicit in this respect. Merely two examples taken from his writings should suffice to answer this question—infant baptism and funeral rites, both explained in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. As for infant baptism, which is mentioned here for the first time, it is to be accepted, because the sponsor speaks and acts on behalf of the child, and it is he who speaks the renunciation and makes promises for the child; this is appropriate since the sponsor accepts the responsibility to bring up the child in accordance with his words.[167] In the end, no one is capable of completely understanding the divine mysteries, as many are beyond the understanding of even the highest angels.[168] As Golitzin concluded, in the human sphere, there can be no true knowledge apart from the knowledge revealed by God in Scriptures and embodied in the Church's structure and liturgy, so that Scripture reveals theology and theurgy, while the liturgy bodies it forth.[169]

This means that, for Dionysius, knowledge is an important aspect of one's ascending path to God—important, but not the only one. Besides knowledge and understanding, the hierarchy administers the sacraments, which have a dual activity, acting on the soul spiritually and on the body physically, both of which are necessary. As Louth has shown, "there is a place for genuine sacramental efficacy in Dionysian sacramental theol-

165. Golitzin, "'On the Other Hand,'" 320.
166. Andia, *Denys l'Aréopagite*, 322.
167. See *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, VII.3.11, 568B.
168. See Rutledge, *Cosmic Theology*, 200.
169. See Golitzin, *Et introibo*, 130ff.

ogy."[170] The same can be said for funeral rites. The entire rite, including the bishop's prayer, would not have any meaning if there was no place for sacramental efficacy. The funeral also proves the dual activity of the hierarchy, on both the soul and the body. If knowledge was the only element of deification, then both infant baptism and funeral rites would be completely pointless, and Dionysius would not bother to mention them at all. Therefore,

> sacred symbols are in some way fully *actualized* within the framework of the liturgical practices, and they allow impartation (to the simple believer ignorant of theological doctrines, as well as to the believer well versed in spiritual exegesis) not just of a simple theoretical knowledge of divine mysteries, but also a spiritual relationship of efficient and deifying *participation*, and therefore, real *proximity* between man and God.[171]

The conclusion that should be drawn ultimately is that for Dionysius, as posited above, knowledge is a highly important factor for deification, that is, for one's ascent to God, but it is not the only one, as it has to be accompanied by the perfection of life and love within the hierarchical structure, and only then one might be able to approach the highest degrees of ἐπιστήμη.[172]

Finally, some general conclusions can be drawn from the overall discussion on the deification theme in Dionysius. He defines deification as achieving union with and likeness to God, which is a definition that, despite its conciseness, develops through different aspects of the Areopagite's thought. One of the strongest aspects in this respect is the sacramental and ecclesiological dimension which directly relates to the very definition of deification, since the goal of the hierarchy is described precisely as attaining union with and likeness to God. It is no wonder then that Dionysius dedicates so much thought to the hierarchical order of the world and of creation in its entirety, as well as to the deifying significance of symbols and sacraments. Another aspect heavily present in the *Corpus* is epistemology, that is, the intellectual endeavor that brings about mystical union with God. These two poles work as a "link that connects the ecclesiastical approach with the philosophical."[173] However, although Dionysius gives a

170. Andrew Louth, "Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism in Denys the Areopagite," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 438.

171. Daniel Cohen, *Formes théologiques et symbolisme sacré chez (Pseudo-) Denys L'Aréopagite* (Bruxelles: Ousia, 2010), 187.

172. See Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 120.

173. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 261.

great deal of reverence to this epistemological element, we have seen that deification is not purely an individualistic process of intellectualist ascent which would exclude the body or one's relations to the totality of the world. On the contrary, despite being very close to the Neoplatonist tradition, the Areopagite stresses that deification happens in both the soul and the body, that is, the human being in its totality becomes deified. In addition, he underlines the cooperative character of deification, not just as the relationship between human beings and God, but also as a community of hierarchically ordered beings. In this way deification represents an ecstatic process where both God and man reach out to each other, and in this reaching out each being is helped and supported by other members of the hierarchy. The end result is the divine darkness bringing about the mystical union with God, which, however, does not happen in the divine hidden and inaccessible essence but in the radiance of his attributes, so that "we shall be ever filled with the sight of God shining gloriously around us as once it shone for the disciples at the divine transfiguration."[174]

174. *De divinis nominibus*, I.4, 592C.

PART 2 MAXIMUS the Confessor

CHAPTER FOUR LOVE

While in Dionysius the Areopagite's system of thought love is mainly represented by the term ἔρως, which he identifies with ἀγάπη, Maximus the Confessor is more prone to using the latter as the central theme of his metaphysics of love. It should not, however, be argued that Maximus avoids talking about ἔρως, since the term recurs frequently in his writings, although it is not fully equated with ἀγάπη,[1] and has a slightly different role. In addition to these two terms, Maximus often employs other expressions, such as πόθος and ἔφεσις, which designate desire or longing, respectively, and φιλανθρωπία, which denotes God's love for humanity. Besides the positive forms of love, Maximus frequently talks about the negative one, which he calls φιλαυτία, self-love, and defines it as the affection for the body which is the mother of all passions and vices.

Love and the Soul

Maximus's teaching on the soul and its sources has been widely studied,[2] so I shall only present its main aspects in this instance. The main feature of Maximus's psychology is the trichotomy of the soul, which he divides into rational, irascible, and concupiscible elements, that is, λόγος, θυμός, and ἐπιθυμία, to which the mind (νοῦς) as an integrative element is usually

1. In one instance Maximus does identify ἔρως and ἀγάπη, and he does it by explicitly quoting Dionysius's *De divinis nominibus*, IV.14. The Confessor comments that God implants an immanent relation of love in beings, and that he moves and is moved, longing to be longed for, and loving to be loved (Maximos the Confessor, "The *Ambigua*," in *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, trans. Nicholas Constas [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014], *Ambiguorum liber* 23 [CCSG 48], 1260BC, hereafter, *Ambiguorum liber*).

2. See, for example, Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 169–207.

added.[3] This trichotomy of the soul is in fact an old idea, present in the entire Greek philosophical and theological tradition, having perhaps its most famous representative in Plato. Namely, in his *Republic*, Plato speaks of the three parts of the soul, which he calls τὸ λογιστικόν, τὸ θυμοειδές, and τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν.[4] The idea returns in *Phaedrus*, where the famous allegory describes irascible and concupiscible elements as two horses of a chariot, the charioteer of which is the rational part of man.[5] Similar teachings on the soul's trichotomy are to be found in Aristotle and the Stoics, as well as in Christian writers such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Evagrius, and Nemesius of Emesa.[6]

The trichotomy of the soul gives Maximus the opportunity to develop his teaching on the passions, which are movements of the soul contrary to nature,[7] and are defined as "unreasonable affection or senseless hate" for a thing (such as a man, woman, or gold) or for a representation which is a recollection of the thing.[8] All three parts of the soul are affected by passions, which "excite the concupiscible, or stir up the irascible, or darken the rational element of the soul."[9] The rational part is affected by ignorance and pride,[10] the irascible part by grief and anger, while the concupiscible part by gluttony, avarice, and fornication.[11] On the other hand, parts of the soul can be put to good use (χρῆσις), so that the concupiscible part can be transformed into the true desire for God and find its true pleasure in relation to the divinity. Similarly, the irascible part, if used positively, strengthens inter-human relations as well as the relation to God in which the soul struggles to attain God. Finally, the good use of the rational part clings to knowledge and prudence and establishes a relationship to God. Maximus summarizes the good use of different parts of the soul as follows:

3. See Maximus the Confessor, "Questions to Thalassius," in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Christ*, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert L. Wilken [Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003] 16 (CCSG 7:107–9), hereafter, *Ad Thalassium*; Maximus the Confessor, "The Four Centuries on Charity," in *The Ascetic Life. The Four Centuries on Charity*, trans. Polycarp Sherwood (New York: The Newman Press, 1955), I.67, hereafter, *De charitate*.

4. See, for example, Plato, *Republic*, IV, 435E–39E.

5. See Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246A–54E.

6. A brief exposition of their teachings is found in Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 179–95. Concupiscence plays an important role in Augustine's doctrine of inherited sin, but this is not the sense in which Maximus's use of the term should be understood.

7. See *De charitate*, I.35.

8. Ibid., III.42.

9. Ibid., III.20.

10. See ibid., III.3; *Ad Thalassium*, 27 (CCSG 7:197).

11. See *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1196C–1197D, for Maximus's exposition of the passionate part of the soul.

For by the misuse of our own powers—reason, desire and the incensive power [λόγου τε καὶ ἐπιθυμίας καὶ θυμοῦ]—these evils [ignorance, self-love, tyranny] are established. For reason, instead of being ignorant [ἀντὶ τῆς ἀγνοίας], ought to be moved through knowledge to seek [ζήτησιν] solely after God; and desire, pure of the passion of self-love, ought to be driven by yearning for God alone [πόθον πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν μόνον]; and the incensive power, separated from tyranny, ought to struggle to attain God alone.[12]

All parts of the soul should strive toward God—through knowledge, yearning, and fervid struggle. On this journey to meet God, the soul uses the rational faculty to search for the Cause and the goods related to the Cause, while the desirous faculty longs for these goods, and the irascible faculty keeps them and cares for them tenderly.[13] However, this is not an easy task, since the material dyad of the soul, that is, its irascible and concupiscible elements, is inclined toward matter and fights the rational part, thus being able to "scatter the mind into multiplicity."[14] This is what happened to Adam, the first man—his mind was not directed upward to God, but rather downward, to matter; so instead of having the natural desire of the mind for God, he "activated an unnatural pleasure through the medium of the senses."[15] In this way the human constitution became distorted, and the right ordering of the soul was disturbed; and so the intellect became subordinate to passions and vices through enslavement meted out by the irrational parts of the soul.[16] "Truly blessed" then are those who can "overcome these powers and force them, as they ought, to support the mind, by yoking them like a slave to the power of reason."[17] The rational, irascible, and concupiscible elements are not to be annihilated, but restored to their natural state in the age to come;[18] these powers are in fact indispensable for receiving divine knowledge, in cooperation with grace.[19] The aforementioned blessedness stems from the rational movement of the soul, which in turn affects all three of its parts, so that the concupiscible element is restrained by self-mastery, the irascible element "clings to charity (ἀγάπη),

12. Maximus, *Letter* 2, in Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 397AB. Hereafter, *Epistula* 2.

13. See *Ad Thalassium*, 55 (CCSG 7:491).

14. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1196A.

15. *Ad Thalassium*, 61 (CCSG 22:85).

16. See Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 176–78.

17. *Ad Thalassium*, 61 (CCSG 22:85).

18. See Maximus the Confessor, *Questions and Doubts*, trans. Despina D. Prassas (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 57 (CCSG 10). Hereafter, *Quaestiones et dubia*.

19. See *Ad Thalassium*, 59 (CCSG 22:45).

turning away from hate," and the rational is directed toward God through prayer and contemplation.[20] In this way the nature of the soul is fulfilled, since "it is of the nature (κατὰ φύσιν) of our rational element to be subject to the divine Word and to rule the irrational element in us"; moreover, if this proper nature is preserved, then evil would be banned from the created world,[21] as evil does not belong to the essence (οὐσία) of creatures but to irrational movement (ἀλόγιστον κίνησιν).[22]

In the context of our subject, Maximus's psychology is helpful for understanding his teaching on love, as it is in relation to the parts of the soul that he develops his notions of ἔρως and ἀγάπη. Explicitly, the two forms of love are ascribed to different elements of the soul, and based on a number of examined texts, it seems to me that Maximus is quite consistent in ascribing ἔρως to the concupiscible element of the soul, while ἀγάπη belongs to its irascible part.[23] In fact, ἔρως and ἀγάπη are transformative and corrective powers of the two passible elements, whereby ἔρως diminishes concupiscence, while ἀγάπη diminishes the movement of irascible passions.[24] This transformation of concupiscence into ἔρως, and of ire into ἀγάπη, happens through the mind's orientation toward God:

> For him whose mind is continually with God, even his concupiscence [ἐπιθυμία] is increased above measure into a divinely burning love [θεῖον ὑπερηύξησεν ἔρωτα]; and the entire irascible element [θυμός] is changed into divine charity [θείαν μετετράπη ἀγάπην]. For by continual participation in the divine illumination, it has become wholly lightsome (light-formed, φωτοειδὴς] and, making the passible element one with itself, it has turned as was said above, to a divinely burning love [ἔρωτα θεῖον] without end and unceasing charity [ἀγάπην], passing over completely from earthly things to the divine.[25]

The mind, then, becomes enlightened and subordinates to itself the passible element of the soul, thus turning the concupiscence and ire for earthly things into love and charity for divine things. The entire soul, in both its rational and passible (concupiscible and irascible) parts, should

20. *De charitate*, IV.15.

21. Ibid., II.83.

22. See ibid., IV.14.

23. In his "Gentiles of the Soul," Paul Blowers mistakenly argues that "irascibility, not concupiscence alone, [can] be transmuted into eros" (72n62). This error is obviously due to a misreading of the passage from *De charitate*, II.48, cited below, which Blowers uses as a basis for his statement. As a matter of fact, the passage clearly states that concupiscence is increased into ἔρως, and the irascible element is changed into ἀγάπη.

24. See *De charitate*, II.47.

25. Ibid., II.48.

strive to seek and attain God, which means that the passible part of the soul has to be "logicized," that is, subordinated to the rational part of the soul. When this happens, writes Maximus in *Ambiguum* 6, the irascible element of the soul is transformed into ἀγάπη, while concupiscence becomes joy, which is man's pleasure in accordance with God's will.[26] Interestingly, the θυμός should also serve as the mind's "sinew" in its tendency to God:

> Our reason [λόγος] also should therefore be moved to seek God, the force of desire should struggle to possess him [πρός τε τὸν αὐτοῦ πόθον ἡ κατ' ἐπιθυμίαν δύναμις] and that of anger to hold on to him [πρός τήν αὐτοῦ φυλακὴν ἀγωνιζέσθω τὸ θυμικόν], or rather, to speak more properly, the whole mind [νοῦς] should tend to God, stretched out as a sinew by the temper of anger [τῷ θυμικῷ τρόπῳ νευρούμενος], and burning with longing for the highest reaches of desire [πόθῳ τῇ κατ' ἄκρον ἐφέσει τῆς ἐπιθυμίας πυρούμενος].[27]

The erotic aspect of the concupiscible element in fact brings about love (ἀγάπη), while the irascible element firmly draws the mind to God through the ἔρως of ἐπιθυμία. In addition, θυμός is transmuted into "spiritual boiling" and "prudent mania."[28] Therefore, it would seem that the passible part of the soul, in its right and proper use, serves as a guide to the mind's path to God. Thus, Maximus writes:

> The second of the mind's elders or captains is the concupiscible faculty [ἐπιθυμητικὴν δύναμιν], by which divine love [θεία ἀγάπη] is produced. Through this love, the mind, voluntarily attaching itself to the desire [πόθῳ] for the undefiled Godhead, has a ceaseless longing for what it desires [παθουμένου τὴν ἔφεσιν]. Still another elder or captain is the irascible faculty [θυμικὴν δύναμιν], by which the mind ceaselessly clings to the peace of God, drawing its movement toward the divine passion of desire [πρὸς τὸν θεῖον ἔρωτα τῆς ἐπιθυμίας τὴν κίνησιν].[29]

The passionate part of the soul obviously plays a crucial role in the ascent to God, as it concerns the proper use of man's natural faculties, which are not to be annihilated but rather transformed and reoriented. God himself bestowed desirous love (ἔρως) and longing (πόθος) to human beings, and he also gave them the knowledge of the ways in which this longing is to be satisfied.[30] In the present state, human ἔρως is more of an impulse

26. See *Ambiguorum liber* 6, 1068A.

27. Maximus Confessor, *Commentary on the Our Father*, in Berthold, *Selected Writings*, 896C (CCSG 23). Hereafter, *Expositio orationis dominicae*.

28. *Ad Thalassium*, 55 (CCSG 7:499).

29. Ibid., 49 (CCSG 7:355), cited in Blowers, "Gentiles of the Soul," 74.

30. See *Ambiguorum liber* 48, 1361AB.

disoriented in the world and attracted to what is perceived by the senses. However, in his providential care, God directs our yearning toward its true, natural, object:

> For the infinitely wise God, who providentially directs the course of our lives, often allows us to use things naturally according to our own impulses in a way that leads to our correction. We see this at times among those who become frenzied in their abuse of material things, for by means of the very confusion and turmoil which both surrounds and is generated by these things, God redirects irrational lust [ἔρως] for the things of this life to a natural object of desire.[31]

Providential care in this erotic sense means the corrective guidance of the natural human erotic impulse toward its natural object instead of the unnatural direction which causes distortion, confusion, and disorder. Just as the wrong passions involve a movement contrary to the nature of the soul, so the passions in their proper use are in accordance with the soul's nature instituted by God. This means that the passionate part of the soul, when directed correctly, is indispensable for man's path to God. In fact, without the passionate part of the soul, all that man is left with is the passionless knowledge of divine things which cannot produce the real departure from the material world.[32] This knowledge becomes nothing but a simple thought, which does not convince the mind to abandon material things, and as such "there is need for the blessed passion [πάθος] of holy charity [ἀγάπη]," which binds the mind to immaterial, intelligible, and divine things rather than to their opposites.[33] This departure from material things, together with the right direction of the soul, is the necessary condition of true love, which Maximus defines as "a good disposition [διάθεσις] of the soul, according to which one prefers no creature to the knowledge of God," and which is impossible to possess "if one has any attachment to earthly things."[34] This attachment to earthly things is in fact the origin of the present state of humanity, which finds itself in a position contrary to its nature. As a matter of fact, if this state of division and distortion were natural, then God would be to blame as the Creator of nature. However, "nothing that is natural can be opposed to God in any way,"[35] and so instead of enjoying God naturally, Adam turned his mind to the unnatural pleasure

31. Ibid., 8, 1104BC.
32. *De charitate*, III.66.
33. See ibid., III.67.
34. Ibid., I.1.
35. Maximus, *Opuscule* 3, in Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 48D.

of material things, and in this, his very first movement, he activated an unnatural pleasure through the medium of the senses.[36]

The entire postlapsarian existence of humanity is, therefore, marked by an unnatural attachment to material things, as a result of Adam's first movement by which he distanced himself from the knowledge and pleasure of God. The task of the humanity is therefore to move contrary to Adam's movement, that is, to move in a natural way which implies the mind's separation from material things and its striving toward God, which in fact means the divine gift of love—this refers to the purified soul which is "freed from passions and gladdened continually by divine charity [ἀγάπη]."[37] The origin of love is explained by Maximus in a sort of genealogical sequence in which each "ring" of the chain is the product of another: "Charity [ἀγάπη] springs from the calm of detachment [ἀπάθεια], detachment from hope [ἐλπίς] in God, hope from patience [ὑπομονὴ] and long-suffering [μακροθυμία]; and these from all-embracing self-mastery [ἐγκράτεια]; self-mastery from fear [φόβος] of God, fear of God from faith [πίστις] in the Lord."[38]

In this instance, Maximus presents a hierarchy of virtues—πίστις, φόβος, ἐγκράτεια, μακροθυμία, ὑπομονὴ, ἐλπίς, ἀπάθεια, ἀγάπη—which closely follows the Evagrian scheme, though not without exceptions.[39] In comparison with the scriptural passage,[40] it would be safe to conclude that the main virtues in Maximus's hierarchy are faith, hope, and love, a triad whose importance has to be highlighted: "At the top of the mind there are the *logos* of faith, the *logos* of hope and the *logos* of love, which dominate over all concepts and divine thoughts of the soul, and wisely counsel the mind in acting against the contrary power and showing the ways of destroying it."[41] Without these three virtues, no evil is totally suppressed, and no good is correctly accomplished, since faith invites the mind to go to war on God's side and to keep courage, while hope guarantees God's help in the destruction of opposing powers, and love persuades the mind to be "im-

36. See *Ad Thalassium*, 61 (CCSG 22:85).

37. *De charitate*, I.34.

38. Ibid., I.2.

39. In Evagrius these are faith, fear of God, self-mastery, patience and hope, detachment, love, natural knowledge, theology, blessedness. Maximus separates hope from patience and introduces long-suffering. In addition, his sequence ends with love, while for Evagrius it is just a component of the hierarchy leading to knowledge. See Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 286ff.

40. "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13).

41. *Ad Thalassium*, 49 (CCSG 7:351).

mutably fixed upon the divine fondness [θείας στοργῆς]." Consequently it is upon divine longing (πόθος) that the whole desirous power (τῆς ἐφέσεως δύναμις) should be fixed.[42]

It appears that love is the peak of this triad—and its culmination. Maximus himself confirms this by saying that faith is the foundation of everything, while hope connects the two extremes, namely faith and love, and love is the fulfilment of the previous two, since it "gives faith the reality of what it believes and hope the presence of what it hopes for, and the enjoyment of what is present."[43] In another passage Maximus connects this triad of virtues to the division of time: "Time is divided in three; faith correspondingly extends to all three parts; hope to one; charity to the remaining two. Faith and hope remain to a certain point, charity for infinite ages in super-union with the super-infinite, ever increasing more. Therefore, the greatest of all is charity."[44]

It seems here that Maximus refers to the division of time as beginning, middle, and end, or more simply past, present, and future. If this scheme is compared to the faith/hope/love triad, it follows that faith corresponds to the beginning or past, hope to the middle or present, and love to both the middle and end or the present and future. Faith is the foundation and the beginning of everything, and as such it also extends to present and future, while hope is the present expectation of the future as it reaches to "make it to the end of the course,"[45] and love is the actualization and fullness of both, because it grants reality to faith and presence to hope. Maximus also says that in this way love "furnishes them rest [στάσις] from their motion."[46] If time is the measure of motion, as Maximus himself believes,[47] and if love is the end of motion, then love stretches beyond time, that is, it extends infinitely in union with the super-infinite. In addition, it might be possible to draw parallels to other two triads employed by Maximus, namely οὐσία/δύναμις/ἐνέργεια, and γένεσις/κίνησις/στάσις. The first triad refers to essence (οὐσία), which is a principle of a motion in potency (δύναμις), while every act (ἐνέργεια) is the actualization of this potency so that essence is the beginning, potency the middle point, and act is the end

42. Ibid.
43. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 396BC.
44. *De charitate*, III.100.
45. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 396B.
46. Ibid., 396C.
47. See Maximus Confessor, *Chapters on Knowledge*, in Berthold, *Selected Writings*, I.5 (hereafter, *Capita gnostica*), where Maximus says that time is the measure of motion, and that to extend in time means to have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

of essential movement.[48] The second triad is becoming/motion/repose, which summarizes the following argument contra-Origen:

> If, in the first place, we accept that the Divine is immovable (since it fills all things), whereas everything that has received its being *ex nihilo* is in motion (since all things are necessarily carried along toward some cause), then nothing that moves has yet come to rest, because its capacity for appetitive movement [κατ' ἔφεσιν κινήσεως τὴν δύναμιν] has not yet come to repose in what it ultimately desires, for nothing but the appearance of the ultimate object of desire can bring to rest that which is carried along by the power of its own nature. It follows, then, that nothing that is in motion has come to rest, since it has not yet attained its ultimate desired end, because that which can arrest the motion of whatever is moved in relation to it has not yet appeared.[49]

The passage above explains how everything that comes to being (is brought from non-being to being) moves according to its desiring power toward the desirable in order to find its rest, so that if a being is in motion, it has not yet reached a desirable end. The correspondences beginning/becoming, middle/motion and end/repose quite clearly come to light. The comparison between the three triads would mean that at the beginning (ἀρχή) the being (οὐσία) comes to being (γένεσις), in the middle (μεσότης) it moves (κίνησις) in accordance with its potency (δύναμις), and at the end (τέλος) it reaches actualization (ἐνέργεια) and finds its rest (στάσις).[50] As Polycarp Sherwood concluded, the triads ἀρχή/μεσότης/τέλος, οὐσία/δύναμις/ἐνέργεια, and γένεσις/κίνησις/στάσις[51] correspond mutually, while στάσις and τέλος have a twofold reference—as closely related to the nature (or essence), or as the final completion, above nature, in infinity.[52] This is also what Maximus means when he says that love is "the goal [τέλος] of every good"[53] and that it remains infinitely in the su-

48. See ibid., I.3. On οὐσία/δύναμις/ἐνέργεια and ἀρχή/μεσότης/τέλος, see Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 114–15.

49. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1069B.

50. Cf. Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 103–17.

51. To these a fourth triad might be added—εἶναι/εὖ εἶναι/ἀεὶ εἶναι. As Maximus explains, "he comes to be *in* God through attentiveness, since he has not falsified the logos of being [εἶναι] that preexists in God; and he *moves* in God in accordance with the logos of well-being [εὖ εἶναι] that preexists in God, since he is moved to action by the virtues; and he *lives* in God in accordance with the logos of eternal-being [ἀεὶ εἶναι] that also preexists in God" (*Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1084B). Again the parallel is clear—being (εἶναι) corresponds to coming to be (γένεσις), then it moves (κίνησις) according to well-being (εὖ εἶναι), and finally it receives its rest (στάσις) in the life in God which is eternal-being (ἀεὶ εἶναι).

52. See Polycarp Sherwood, "Maximus and Origenism: ΑΡΧΗ ΚΑΙ ΤΕΛΟΣ," in *Berichte zum XI Internationalen Byzantinisten Kongress*, ed. S. Kyriakidis (Munich: Beck, 1958), 8.

53. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 396B.

per-union with the super-infinite. Faith, hope, and love are therefore put into ontological and soteriological contexts, and they are seen by Maximus "as instruments on man's way from beginning to end, from coming into being to repose."[54]

In the context of the faith/hope/love scheme, it seems that fear of God, self-mastery, long-suffering, and patience are transitory virtues on the road from faith to hope, while detachment is a middle virtue between hope and love. The reverse sequence applies to man, in whom the initial step is faith in God, which gives birth to other qualities and ends with love of God, as the culmination and summit of the causal trajectory: "He that has faith in the Lord fears punishment; he that fears punishment masters his passions; he that masters his passions endures hardship with patience; he that endures hardship with patience will have hope in God; hope in God separates the mind from every earthly attachment; the mind thus separated will have charity toward God."[55]

The free mind which possesses love for God also engages in intellectual activity, since "he who loves God prefers knowledge of Him to all things made by Him," and consequently, this knowledge triggers man's desirous devotion to it. In this way Maximus reveals an important gnoseological dimension to his erotology, in that love is in some way mind's guide toward knowledge: "As the light of the sun draws the healthy eye to itself, so also the knowledge of God naturally by means of love [διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης] attracts the pure mind to itself."[56] In this metaphor, the light of the sun corresponds to knowledge, while the healthy eye is paired with the pure mind. The vehicle of their connection is love. Here Maximus uses a visible natural phenomenon to symbolize something invisible and supra-natural: the vision of the invisible is not achieved through physical eyes, but through the mind, and just as the eyes have to be healthy in order to capture the sun, so the mind has to be pure in order to attain the knowledge of God. Maximus uses a similar metaphor when stating that the mind, when illumined by the divine light, does not pay attention to anything created, just as the eyes do not perceive stars when the sun has risen.[57] In this state the mind moves outside of itself and outside of all things, to reach an ecstatic condition caused by the erotic character of divine love: "When the mind by the burning love of its charity [ἔρως τῆς ἀγάπης] for God is out of itself, then

54. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 320.
55. *De charitate*, I.3.
56. Ibid., I.32.
57. See ibid., I.10.

it has no feeling at all for itself nor for any creature."[58] Love both purifies the soul and prepares the mind for its journey toward knowledge,[59] and thus Maximus's idea of love holds both psychological and gnoseological importance. "The yearning for knowledge [τῆς γνώσεως ἔρως]" crushes the pain, and aspiration to virtues vanquishes physical pleasure, which brings salvation to the one who cherishes these two dispositions.[60]

However, the knowledge of God can never be complete, not even when the mind is "placed in God and inflamed with desire [πόθος]."[61] What the mind can know are God's attributes but not his being, and so, in a clear cataphatic-apophatic manner, Maximus exclaims that "the very fact of knowing nothing is knowledge surpassing the mind."[62] Therefore, complete knowledge of God is not possible, but what is possible is the complete union with God in desire and love.[63] Those who have acquired faith, hope, and love are granted access to the mystical vision in which the Logos is no longer "spoken of by affirmation, being called God and holy and king and such things, but according to what is beyond God and beyond holy and according to all the sayings with regard to his pre-eminence, he is spoken of by negation."[64]

This kind of loving union is brought about by the erotic movement of the mind, and it is thus not an irrational or purely impulsive movement, but it is an experiential-intellectual and ecstatic movement whose goal is union with the beloved:

> If an intellective being is moved intellectively, that is, in a manner appropriate to itself, then it will necessarily become a knowing intellect. But if it knows, it surely loves that which it knows [ἐρᾷ πάντως τοῦ νοηθέντος]; and if it loves, it certainly

58. Ibid. See also ibid., II.6, where Maximus speaks of the two states of pure prayer, one for active people and the other for contemplative people. The first is paired with fear from God and hope, while the second corresponds to ἔρως and purification. In the second state, the erotic and purified one, the mind is "rapt by the divine and infinite light" and is not conscious of itself or of anything else, except of "Him who through charity effects such brightness in it." On action and contemplation, cf. Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 331–39. To action and contemplation, a third element should be added—theology. Hausherr writes that these three states are not three paths or segments, but are to be considered as a whole life, just as a child becomes an adolescent and then an adult (Hausherr, *Philautie*, 132).

59. See *De charitate*, IV.62: "Therefore knowledge necessarily stands in need of charity." Also ibid., I.69, where Maximus speaks of "the way of peace that leads the lovers of the knowledge of God through charity to that knowledge."

60. See *Ad Thalassium*, 47 (CCSG 7:323).

61. *De charitate*, I.100.

62. Ibid.

63. See Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 321–22.

64. *Quaestiones et dubia*, 191.

suffers an ecstasy toward it as an object of love ([ἐραστὸν]. If it suffers this ecstasy, it obviously urges itself onward, and if it urges itself onward, it surely intensifies and greatly accelerates its motion. And if its motion is intensified in this way, it will not cease until it is wholly present in the whole beloved, and wholly encompassed by it.[65]

Eros, therefore, represents the immediate and intense desirous movement which finds its rest only in the being's complete embrace and union with the object of love. This movement is ecstatic in character, which means that the being belongs not to itself but to the beloved, and that it is not known through itself but through the beloved.[66] Thus, it is possible for Maximus to say that the mind "dwells entirely in God alone in a loving ecstasy [κατ' ἐρωτικὴν ἔκστασιν]."[67]

Self-Love

If love is the summit and culmination of virtues, so self-love (φιλαυτία) is the mother of all vices and passions.[68] Self-love, which Maximus often defines as the unnatural affection for the body,[69] is opposed to love, and it is man's greatest enemy. In stating the vicious character of self-love Maximus comes quite close to Plato, who writes:

There is an evil, great above all others, which most men have, implanted in their souls, and which each one of them excuses in himself and makes no effort to avoid. It is the evil indicated in the saying that every man is by nature a lover of self, and that it is right that he should be such. But the truth is that the cause of all sins in every case lies in the person's excessive love of self [ἑαυτοῦ φιλία].[70]

Similar in this respect are the ideas of Clement of Alexandria who proclaims that "their self-love is the cause of all their mistakes."[71] However, Maximus seems to be the one who pays most attention to the concept of φιλαυτία. According to him, the one possessed by self-love has all the passions,[72] and it is self-love that distracts humankind from the unity of nature,

65. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1073CD.

66. See Nikolaos Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*, trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), 173–77.

67. *Capita gnostica*, I.39.

68. See *De charitate*, II.8, II.59.

69. See ibid., II.59, III.8, III.57.

70. Plato, *Leges*, 731DE.

71. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, VI.7.56.

72. See *De charitate*, III.8.

will, and inclination. Just as love causes human beings not to divert from the *logos* of nature and to be "one nature, so that we are able to have one inclination and one will with God and with one another,"[73] so self-love introduces discord, fragmentation, and multitude:

> For since the deceitful devil at the beginning contrived by guile to attack humankind through his self-love, deceiving him through pleasure, he has separated us in our inclinations from God and from one another, and turned us away from rectitude. He has divided nature at the level of mode of existence, fragmenting it into a multitude of opinions and imaginations. He has set up the means through which each vice may be discovered, and with time established a law, to which all our powers are devoted, introducing into everything a wicked support for the continuance of vice—namely, irreconcilable inclinations. By this he has prevailed on humankind to turn from the natural movement he once had and to move his longing from what is permitted to what is forbidden. Thus humankind has brought into being from itself the three greatest, primordial evils, and (to speak simply) the begetters of all vice: ignorance, I mean, and self-love and tyranny, which are interdependent and established one through another.[74]

Self-love is therefore a vehicle of the devil's deception, which forces humanity into a fragmented and distorted state marked by a constant passion for pleasure and the fear of pain. Both pleasure and pain are in fact used by the devil in a way that diminishes the desire of love and provokes hatred toward God:

> For according to Scripture there are two kinds of temptations, one pleasurable and the other painful, the first being intentional and the other unintentional. . . . The Evil One mischievously uses both types of temptations, voluntary and involuntary, the first by sowing and greatly provoking the soul with bodily pleasures and scheming first to take away the desire of divine love [τῆς θείας ἀγάπης ἔφεσις]. Then he cunningly works on the other type . . . to set in motion the attitudes of hatred of the Creator.[75]

The same temptations were paraded before Adam, and so his desire for pleasure, or escape from pain, set him on the path of unpermitted longing, which is a path of vice, of evil, contrary to the natural movement. In his craving to satisfy his needs through pleasure, he became ignorant (of God), which led him to self-love and the tyranny of others.[76] This distortion op-

73. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 396C.
74. Ibid., 396D–397A.
75. *Expositio orationis dominicae*, 908BC.
76. See Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 177.

erates in a twofold manner, in that it turns human beings away from God and from one another. Furthermore, it introduces division within nature[77] which reflects in "a multitude of opinions and imaginations." As "the first sin, the first progeny of the devil and the mother of the passions," Maximus points out self-love as a generator of all the vices, such as pride, glory, anger, bloodthirstiness, wrath, guile, hypocrisy, greed, resentment, etc.[78] In addition, he speaks about avarice and vainglory as the first offspring of self-love, to which gluttony is to be added,[79] and from these a further nine vices are begotten,[80] while elsewhere Maximus talks about the twenty-seven vices generated by pleasure and another twenty-four generated by escape from pain, to which another six are added as the result of combining pleasure and pain.[81]

If self-love is the generic vice which begets all vices and through them is manifested, and if Maximus defines self-love as the irrational and unnatural attachment to the body, then it follows that the root of all wickedness stands in the mind's distraction from ineffable spiritual pleasure and its devotion to material sensible things, that is, the body:

> When God created human nature, he did not create sensible pleasure and pain along with it; rather, he furnished it with a certain spiritual capacity [κατὰ νοῦν] for pleasure, a pleasure whereby human beings would be able to enjoy God ineffably. But at the instant he was created, the first man, by use of his senses, squandered this spiritual capacity—the natural desire of the mind for God [κατὰ φύσιν τοῦ νοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἔφεσιν]—on sensible things. In this, his very first movement, he activated an unnatural [παρὰ φύσιν] pleasure through the medium of the senses.[82]

Instead of the spiritual pleasure of God, Adam turned his mind to sensible things, thus perverting human nature. This perversion is manifested

77. This division, however, is not absolute. It does not concern the nature in itself, its *logos*, which is the preexistent idea in God, but it rather manifests on the level of the mode of existence, the *tropos*. Therefore, human nature is not destroyed or annihilated but corrupted. This wrong mode of existence is effected through the individualistic (gnomic) will, which in the fallen state of humanity is contrary to the natural will. Man's goal would, therefore, be to rise above the gnomic will to the level of the natural will and thus accord the *tropos* of existence with the *logos* of nature. Maximus's conception of will, including the gnomic will, has been widely studied. I shall not dwell on it further here, and it suffices to point to some of the studies on the subject: Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 213–18; Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 2004; Filip Ivanovic, "Il concetto della volontà nel pensiero di Massimo il Confessore," *Philotheos: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 11 (2011): 109–26. The concept of the will is also addressed in the following chapter on deification in Maximus.

78. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 397D.

79. See *De charitate*, II.59.

80. See ibid., III.56.

81. See *Ad Thalassium*, prol. (CCSG 7:33).

82. Ibid., 61 (CCSG 22:85).

through the wrong direction taken by natural faculties: "Evil means failure to direct toward the goal [τέλος] the powers inherent in the nature of beings. Or again, evil is the irrational movement [ἀλόγιστος κίνησις] of natural faculties toward something different than the goal, according to a wrong judgment. And by the goal I mean the Cause of beings, toward which all things are naturally directed."[83] In this evil direction of his natural powers, Adam detached himself from God and tied his mind to material things in which he found a new goal for his faculties. This also meant that the mind turned away from real knowledge and fell into ignorance:

> The more, then, that man preoccupied himself with a knowledge based exclusively on the experience of sensible things, the more he bound himself with ignorance [ἀγνοία] of God. The more he bound himself with the chain of this ignorance, the more he cleaved to the experience of the sensual enjoyment of material objects of knowledge. The more he indulged himself in this enjoyment, the more he aroused the desire of the self-love which it produces. The more diligently he seized the desire of self-love, the more he invented multiple ways to sustain his pleasure, which is the fruit and object of self-love.[84]

To be taken over by self-love means, for Maximus, the ultimate violation of order and an escape from God's plan, the consequences of which are death and decay. This distortion of order and enjoyment in material instead of spiritual pleasures comes down, in Von Balthasar's words, "to giving an intellectual nature sensible, temporal, transitory food to nourish its being, and, so, to poison it at its root, to hand it over to death."[85] In an attempt to satisfy the desire for the divine immanent to his nature, man accomplishes quite the opposite—instead of fulfilling this desire in assimilation to and unity with God, he tried to give perfection and absolute existence to nature in itself, independently of God.[86] This failed attempt at self-divinization led to a cult of the body, and consequently to the divinization of everything that supports the preservation of the body. However, as Larchet writes, this divinization of creatures through their body is merely a pseudo-divinization, a substitute for the real deification which has to be accomplished only according to the divine plan.[87] But passionate attachment to the self and devotion to everything that preserves the body leads to the constant craving for possessions, or a "mégalomanie du désir," to use

83. Ibid., prol. (CCSG 7:29–31).
84. Ibid. (CCSG 7:31).
85. Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 184.
86. See Garrigues, *La charité*, 176–77.
87. See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 193–94.

Garrigues's quite descriptive words.[88] Attachment to the body generates all the other vices, since in "material-mindedness" and preference for worldly things,[89] man loses his connection to God, and fights with other men[90] in his constant desire to possess everything that surrounds him. In this way our nature became shattered into myriad pieces, and we became similar to beasts that fight and devour each other.[91]

The effects of egoistic love and passions are twofold, in that they are manifested on both the individual level and on the level of humanity in its entirety. The tension between one's *logos* and one's mode of existence introduces a split in one's own nature, while egoism and individualism divide the whole of human nature, which falls into multiplicity and discord. This state reflects the good–evil duality, since "evil is by nature dispersed, unstable, polymorph, and divisible," while good is always realized through unity and the gathering of separated elements.[92] Evil then separates and corrupts unity, unity which should be the character of individual natures as well as of the whole humanity. Ultimately, by introducing multiplicity, ignorance, and decay, self-love represents the negation of and opposition to unity and communion, truth and knowledge, and finally life itself. In its self-annihilating character, it represents, as Loudovikos writes, "the full tragedy of the total division of a being, the multiple fragmentation which annihilates it."[93]

Self-love as the irrational attachment to the body obviously has an extremely negative connotation in Maximus's view, since it introduces mutability, instability, and fragmentation, which are all characteristics contrary to the good. However, if man is a composite of the soul and the body, then love of the self should not be limited only to attachment to the body, but there should be also an attachment to the soul or to the mind, as an expression of a different, rational and unitary, self-love. This positive self-love, in fact, represents the dissociation from carnal affection, and it urges the soul to find its true constitution in God. In Maximus's words:

> There is liberation of all evils, a quick path toward salvation: it is the true love of God in knowledge [κατ' ἐπίγνωσιν ἀγάπη], and soul's absolute extinction of the affection for the body and for this world. If, by this extinction, we reject the ap-

88. Garrigues, *La charité*, 176–77.

89. See Maximus the Confessor, *The Ascetic Life*, in *The Ascetic Life: The Four Centuries on Charity*, trans. Polycarp Sherwood (New York: The Newman Press, 1955), 7. Hereafter, *Liber asceticus*.

90. See ibid.

91. See *Ad Thalassium*, prol. (CCSG 7:33).

92. Ibid., 16 (CCSG 7:107).

93. Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology*, 143.

petite for pleasure and the fear of pain, then we liberate ourselves from the evil self-love [κακή φιλαυτία] and we head to the knowledge of the Creator; in place of the perverse self-love we will have intellectual self-love [νοερά φιλαυτία] which is separated from all carnal affection; and then we will not cease to worship God according to this beautiful self-love [καλή φιλαυτία], in constant search of the soul's structure [σύστασις] in God. And that is the authentic, truly God-pleasing, worship: the vigilant care of the soul stemming from the practice of virtues.[94]

Positive self-love therefore requires the extinction of evil self-love; it is the intellectual φιλαυτία which directs the mind to God, thus setting the man on the right path to fulfilling his original calling to become one with God and to enjoy the spiritual pleasure of such a union. As opposed to evil self-love, manifested through irrational movement, ignorance, sensible pleasures, and pain, "beautiful self-love" transcends pleasure and pain, as it operates rationally, and finds its end in the knowledge of the Cause. Since man was created to find his rest and enjoyment in God, then the positive kind of self-love is to be understood as an instrument employed to realize of the divine plan. If to love someone implies to care for the beloved and to strive for what is good for him or her, and if there can be no greater good for man than the plan God has for him, then the νοερά φιλαυτία is the only true expression of the right love of the self. To put it more concisely, such self-love brings about liberation and full self-realization operated through man's orientation toward the divine end.

God's Love for Humankind

The cure for self-love is to be found in its opposite—in true, genuine love. If self-love is "the first sin, the first progeny of the devil, and the mother of the passions,"[95] love, on the other hand, is "a great good, and of goods the first and most excellent good."[96] Love is, in fact, a powerful adversary of self-love, instituted in human beings by God. His love is the vessel of humankind's salvation:

> Because of this [love], the Creator of nature himself—who has ever heard of anything so truly awesome!—has clothed himself with our nature, without change uniting it hypostatically to himself, in order to check what has been borne away, and gather it to himself, so that, gathered to himself, our nature may no longer

94. *Ad Thalassium*, prol. (CCSG 7:39–41).
95. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 397C.
96. Ibid., 401C.

have any differences from him in its inclination. In this way he clearly establishes the all-glorious way of love, which is truly divine and deifying and leads to God. Indeed, love is said to be God himself, which from the beginning the thorns of self-love have covered up: in this prefiguring the passions that have overwhelmed us and from which obstacles he has granted us freedom.[97]

Clearly, love plays a significant role in the divine plan, as both salvation and incarnation are rooted in God's philanthropy. It is due to his love for humankind that God incarnates himself in order to bring about man's salvation. Out of his philanthropy, God became one of us, and furthermore he did not love us as himself but even more than himself, since he chose to let himself suffer and die instead of us, thus showing that "nothing is more proper to his glory than the salvation of man."[98] Commenting on a biblical passage that mentions the fish laid out in some embers by Christ after the resurrection, Maximus gives a vivid depiction of the interplay between incarnation and salvation, with love for humankind as its driving force:

The fish shows human nature swimming in the confusion of the passions, which because of his ineffable love for humankind the Lord went down into the sea of life, drew it [human nature] forth again, roasted [it] in the fire of the Holy Spirit, and melted away from it every stickiness of passions; [and] he has made it food for himself as well as for the apostles. For the Logos always hungers for our salvation along with those who follow him.[99]

In some other instances, Maximus claims that "this was the sole reason for his birth in the flesh: the salvation of human nature,"[100] or that the "God-Word became flesh … to save the image and grant immortality to the flesh,"[101] and also that "our salvation is the principle and only reason of his admirable coming into the flesh."[102] Salvation, therefore, is the goal of the incarnation, which is the indispensable humanization of God, since "the human nature can only be restored from the inside, in itself, and by God only."[103] This restoration of the "mortified" nature identifies with its vivification operated by God through his sufferings and out of his love for humankind.[104]

97. Ibid., 404BC.
98. Maximus, *Epistula* 44, 641D.
99. *Quaestiones et dubia*, 45.
100. *Ambiguorum liber* 3, 1040B.
101. Ibid., 42, 1336A.
102. Maximus, *Epistula* 11, 456C.
103. Larchet, *La divinisation*, 227.
104. *Quaestiones et dubia*, 11.

Incarnation, in fact, is a manifestation of both the created and the uncreated, and it is the ultimate divine work in time, through which God makes himself present to the world and unites the opposites through the person of Christ. At the same time, he displays himself to the world and draws to him those who behold this manifestation. In a dialectic of revelation and hiddenness, divinity remains unknown in its essence, but at the same time it reveals itself as the lover of humankind:

> For in his measureless love for humankind, there was need for him to be created in human form (without undergoing any change), and to become a type and symbol of himself, presenting himself symbolically by means of his own self, and, through the manifestation of himself, to lead all creation to himself (though he is hidden and totally beyond all manifestation), and to provide human beings, in a human-loving fashion, with the visible divine actions of his flesh as signs of his invisible infinity.[105]

In the incarnation, as the sign of God's philanthropy, "the transcendent God, who in his condescension never ceases being transcendent, becomes visibly accessible precisely as the transcendent lover of humankind."[106] The ultimate revelation of divine philanthropy is Jesus Christ, the Son, the second person of the Trinity, who entered into the hypostatic union with the flesh. The sacrifice undertaken by God is the highest expression of his love, by which he restores human nature and defeats self-love through the power of love:

> God who made nature and wisely healed it when it was sick through wickedness, through his love toward us [δι' ἀγάπην τὴν πρὸς ἡμᾶς], "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:7), and without change united himself to this [nature] hypostatically. For our sake and from us and through us, he became wholly man. . . . In this way the works of the devil were dissolved, and nature restored to its pure powers, and by again bringing about union with him and of human beings with one another, God renewed the power of love [ἀνακαινίσῃ τῆς ἀγάπης τὴν δύναμιν], the adversary of self-love.[107]

While God became wholly man, this happened on the hypostatic level; yet, in his essence, he remained unknown, since "the Word remained in possession of his own mind and life, contained in essence by no other than the Father and the Spirit, while hypostatically realizing out of love for man

105. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1168A.
106. Cooper, *Body in St Maximus*, 154.
107. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 397BC.

[διὰ φιλανθρωπίαν] the union with the flesh."[108] However, this does not mean that divine philanthropy is a distinctive mark only of the Person of the Son; on the contrary, Christ's philanthropy is the manifestation of the love for humankind contained in the whole Trinity. As a matter of fact, "the full Father and the full Holy Spirit are essentially and completely in the full Son, even the incarnate Son, without being themselves incarnate."[109] Furthermore, while it is true that the Son effects the incarnation, it is also true that the other two persons of the Trinity are involved—the Father by giving approval [εὐδοκία], and the Spirit by cooperating in the incarnation.[110] Since all three persons of the Trinity have a role in the incarnation, then, Christ is a sort of revelation of the Trinity, in that he is a mediator between God and man, because "through his flesh he made manifest to men the Father whom they did not know, and through the Spirit he leads the men whom he reconciled in himself to the Father."[111] In the incarnation Christ reveals the mystery of the Father's Counsel: "The great plan of God the Father is the secret and unknown mystery of the dispensation which the only-begotten Son revealed by fulfilling in the incarnation, thus becoming a messenger of the great plan of God the eternal Father."[112]

Christ, the Son and the second person of the Trinity, is, therefore, the central figure of incarnation and salvation—he is the point of intersection between divinity and humanity, not just because he hypostatically unites the two natures, but also because he represents the connection between the Godhead and humankind, inasmuch as he reveals the Father to men, and brings them back to him through the Spirit. This bringing back is filial adoption through the Spirit, "a supernatural birth from on high in grace"[113] by which all human beings become sons of the Father. This new birth is made possible according to the Trinitarian economy of philanthropy which is accomplished in the kenosis of the Son.[114] The philanthropic kenosis of the Son manifests, in fact, love as the principle of Trinity's inner life.[115] Love, therefore, is the key by which human beings are permitted to behold

108. *Expositio orationis dominicae*, 876D.

109. Ibid., 876C.

110. Ibid. See also *Ad Thalassium*, 60 (CCSG 22:79); and *Opuscule* 16, 192A.

111. *Expositio orationis dominicae*, 876B.

112. *Capita gnostica*, II.23.

113. *Expositio orationis dominicae*, 876C.

114. See more on this in Garrigues, *La charité*, 156–58, 176; Felix Heinzer, "L'explication trinitaire de l'économie chez Maxime le Confesseur," in Heinzer and Schoenborn, *Maximus Confessor*, 159–172.

115. See Garrigues, *La charité*, 157.

the Trinity, because the Trinity itself is love.[116] Moreover, the path to the Trinity is the path of love, while man's guide on this path is Christ as the second hypostasis of the Trinity and as the agent of incarnation:

> "For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen," says the divine Apostle John, "cannot love God whom he has not seen." This is the way of truth, as the Word of God calls himself, that leads those who walk in it, pure of all passions, to God the Father. This is the door, through which the one who enters finds himself in the Holy of Holies, and is made worthy to behold the unapproachable beauty of the holy and royal Trinity.[117]

The way of truth is at the same time the way of love,[118] which is the highest possible form of ascent, since "all other ways of true religion are subordinate to it."[119] The very purpose of the Incarnation is man's salvation and deification, and ascent-descent and incarnation-deification are just opposite directions of the same road on which man becomes God to the degree that God has become man, "for man has been guided by God, through the stages of divine ascent, into the highest regions, to the same degree that God has descended down to the farthest reaches of our nature."[120] The main agent unfolding the incarnation-deification relationship is love, since God manifests the power of reciprocal disposition, "a power that divinizes man through his love for God [φιλόθεον], and humanizes God through his love for man [φιλάνθρωπον]."[121] In fact, Maximus goes so far as to claim that God and man are paradigms of each other, they are in a relationship in which φιλανθρωπία and ἀγάπη reflect one another, just as incarnation mirrors deification, and the other way around:

> God and man are paradigms of each other [παραδείγματα ἀλλήλων], so that as much as man, enabled by love [δι' ἀγάπης], has divinized himself for God, to the same extent God is humanized for man by his love for mankind [διὰ φιλανθρωπίαν]; and as much as man has manifested God who is invisible by nature though virtues, to that same extent man is rapt by God in mind to the unknowable.[122]

116. See Maximus, *Epistula* 25, 613A: "I believe, in accordance with the tradition and the teachings received, that God is love."

117. Ibid., 2, 404A.

118. The same passage (ibid., 404A) appears in the Pseudo-Maximian *Capitum quinquies centenorum centuria* (I.37–38, 1193A), with one difference—instead of the biblical quotation, the author opens the section, surely not by chance, with the sentence Ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας ὁδὸς, ἡ ἀγάπη ἐστὶν.

119. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 401D.

120. *Ambiguorum liber* 60, 1385BC.

121. Ibid., 7, 1084C. This mutual exchange is reinforced even more by Maximus's employment of φιλάνθρωπον and φιλόθεον.

122. Ibid., 10, 1113BC.

In this exchange, operated through love, God takes on human nature and descends to the created world, while man, uniting his nature with the divine, ascends to the realm of the uncreated.[123] Love is here presented not only as the carrier of both incarnation and deification, but also as a measure of the reciprocity between the two—it is the link between "as much" and "so much." Furthermore, love facilitates man's calling to manifest God through virtues, which is upheld by the keeping of the commandments, which, not surprisingly, are all summarized in the double commandment of love.

Love for God and Love for Neighbor

Observing the commandments is of the utmost importance for Maximus. The commandments are a legacy of the Incarnation and the instrument of salvation; they are the key that opens the doors to the kingdom of heaven. The Confessor explains it by synthetically telling the story of creation, Incarnation, and salvation:

> Man, made by God in the beginning and placed in Paradise, transgressed the commandment and was made subject to corruption and death. Then, though governed from generation to generation by the various ways of God's Providence, yet he continued to make progress in evil and was led on, by his various fleshly passions, to despair of life. For this reason the only-begotten Son of God, Word of God the Father from all ages, the source of life and immortality, *enlightened* us *who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death*. Taking flesh by the Holy Spirit and the holy Virgin, He showed us a godlike way of life; He gave us holy commandments and promised the kingdom of heaven to those who lived according to them, threatening with eternal punishment those that transgressed them. Suffering His saving Passion and rising from the dead, He bestowed upon us the hope of resurrection and eternal life. From the condemnation of ancestral sin He absolved by obedience; by death He destroyed the power of death, so that *as in Adam all die, so in Him all shall be made alive*. Then, ascended into heaven and seated on the right of the Father, He sent the Holy Spirit as a pledge of life, and as enlightenment and sanctification for our souls, and as a help to those who struggle to keep His commandments for their salvation. This, in brief, is the purpose of the Lord's becoming man.[124]

Here is all human drama summed up in one passage—creation, sin, death, incarnation, commandments, salvation, hope, resurrection, and eternal life,

123. See Panayiotis Christou, "Maximos Confessor on the Infinity of Man," in Heinzer and Schoenborn, *Maximus Confessor*, 267.

124. *Liber asceticus*, 1.

are all set in an interplay that describes human existence in its entirety: past, present, and future. While Adam failed to live up to his nature and was subjected to death and corruption, Christ, on the other hand, fulfilled his task—through obedience he defeated sin, and by death he destroyed death, thus bestowing upon human beings the possibility of salvation and becoming their example. What seems to be crucial in this passage by Maximus is the emphasis he places on the commandments—the transgression of the original commandment made human beings corruptible and mortal, while, after the Incarnation, observance of the commandments will lead them to salvation, which in turn means eternal life. The commandments, though many in number, are all unified and summed up in the commandment of love: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole strength, and with thy whole mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."[125] This unity of all the commandments into the one of love is not surprising, if one bears in mind that Maximus considers love to be the culmination and summit of all virtues[126] and "of goods the first and most excellent good."[127] Furthermore, the mystery of love "reduces the individual commandments to a universal *logos*,"[128] which does not represent the ethical guidelines of one's behavior only but acquires a metaphysical dimension, since "*logos* is the uniting of what is distant, and unreason is the division of what is united."[129] The double character of love, as the love for God and the love for the neighbor, is therefore the core of man's ability to fulfil the purpose of his nature and of the possibility to partake of the divinity: "The whole purpose of the Savior's commandments is to free the mind from incontinence and hate and to bring it to the love of Himself and its neighbor."[130]

The commandment of love which instructs man to love God and his neighbor is the expression of the twofold—however unitary—character of love in general. The singleness of love is affirmed explicitly by Maximus: "This we know as love and so we call it, not divisively assigning one form of love to God and another to human beings, for it is one and the same and universal: owed to God and attaching human beings one to another."[131] The expression of their unity and singularity is also manifested through

125. Ibid., 2.

126. See *Ad Thalassium*, 40 (CCSG 7:269): "Love is the most general of virtues." In ibid., 54 (CCSG 7:451), Maximus talks about love as the τέλος of all virtues.

127. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 401C.

128. Ibid., 393C.

129. *Expositio orationis dominicae*, 877BC.

130. *De charitate*, IV.56.

131. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 401D.

their mutual dependence and the fact that the former expresses and defines the latter, and vice versa. Just as "he that loves God cannot help loving also every man as himself,"[132] so also the proof of love for God "is a genuine disposition of voluntary goodwill toward one's neighbor."[133] Maximus is never too tired to affirm this idea of love's unity in duality:

> We, in our weakness and material-mindedness, preferred material and worldly things above the commandment of love; and clinging to them we fight with men, though love for every man must be preferred above all visible things, even the body. This is the sign of our love for God, as the Lord Himself shows in the Gospels: "He that loves me," He says, "will keep my commandments." And what this commandment is, which if we keep we love Him, hear Him tell: "This is my commandment, that you love one another." Do you see that this love for one another makes firm the love for God, which is the fulfilling of every commandment of God?[134]

Just as love is unity expressed in a twofold way, so its result is twofold unity—man's unity with God and men's unity with one another. Unification and communion are collectively the great work of love, which is brought about by God, who himself is love: "I believe, in accordance with the tradition and the teachings received, that God is love; and that as He is one and never ceases to be one, so He unites into one those who live in accordance to His love, bestowing on them one heart and soul even though they are many."[135] In this way love operates unification and gathering, which is always a manifestation of good, as opposed to fragmentation and multiplicity which are signs of evil.[136] In such a character, love represents "the essence of unity" and "a movement of assimilation to God."[137] The model of such unifying power of love is Christ, who contains all beings in his goodness and acts as "the center of straight lines that radiate from him," and in this way he prevents the principles of being from becoming disunited, and instead "circumscribes their extension in a circle and brings back to himself the distinctive elements of beings."[138] If possessing love and exercising it mean unification and godlikeness, then their opposites cause destruction

132. *De charitate*, I.13. See also ibid., I.14: "Charity toward God in no way suffers hate toward man."

133. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 404A.

134. *Liber asceticus*, 7.

135. Maximus, *Epistula* 25, 613A.

136. See *Ad Thalassium*, 16 (CCSG 7:107).

137. Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology*, 140.

138. Maximus Confessor, *The Church's Mystagogy*, in *Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 1 (CCSG 69:13). Hereafter, *Mystagogia*.

and nothingness: "The purpose of this is so that the creations and products of the one God be in no way strangers and enemies to one another by having no reason or center for which they might show each other any friendly or peaceful sentiment or identity, and not run the risk of having their being separated from God to dissolve into nonbeing."[139] The only way to avoid separation from God and dissolution is through the state of communion and peace, profoundly marked by love "which gathers together what has been separated, once again fashioning the human being in accordance with a single *logos* and *tropos*."[140] Being in accordance with the single *logos* of human nature means realizing authentic existence, harmonizing mode of being with nature,[141] and going back to God. The true example of such an existence was Abraham, who "was made worthy to see God, and to receive him, since he lived naturally in accordance with the perfect natural *logos* through love for humankind," thanks to which he did not differentiate between human beings, but knew "all as one and one as all."[142] This unity of creation as the object of love comes from the constant attention given to the highest attributes of God, reflected in his goodness and love, so that those who model themselves in accordance with these attributes clean the soul of passions and pleasures[143] and become good, "lovers of both God and their fellow men, full of compassion and mercy, and [are] proved to possess one single disposition of love for the whole of mankind."[144]

Not differentiating between human beings means loving them all equally, without any regard to possible positive or negative personal relationships. Selective love, love that discriminates between friends and enemies, is not real love and does not fulfil the commandment. This kind of love is more attributable to animals driven by instincts, but not to human beings as rational beings:

> Those that are created after the image of God and are motivated by reason, that are thought worthy of knowledge of God and receive their law from Him, it is possible not to repulse those that cause grief and to love those that hate them. Hence when

139. Ibid. (CCSG 69:13–14).

140. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 400A.

141. See *Ambiguorum liber* 42, 1341D: "the mode [of nature] is the order whereby it naturally acts and is acted upon, frequently alternating and changing, without however in any way changing the nature along with it." Cf. Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 144.

142. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 400C.

143. In relation to the soul, the love for God comes from the good use of the concupiscible faculty, while the good use of the irascible element primes one for the love for neighbor. This division is not absolute, however there are interconnections between the twofold love and the two parts of the soul. See Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 315–17.

144. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1205A.

the Lord says: "Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you," and what follows, He does not command the impossible, but clearly what is possible.[145]

This is exactly what the twofold commandment of love implies—to love God, means to imitate him, and to imitate him means to love both friends and enemies, while all humankind, just like God in his philanthropy, loves all human beings. Out of this philanthropy, God became flesh, in the person of Christ, precisely to teach men how to observe the commandments correctly, in order to work out the means of their salvation:

> Our Lord, Jesus Christ, being God by nature and, because of His kindness [διὰ φιλανθρωπίαν], deigning also to become man, was born of a woman, and made under the law, as the divine Apostle says, that by observing the commandment as man He might overturn the ancient curse on Adam. Now the Lord knew that the whole law and the prophets depend on the two commandments of the law—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." He therefore was eager to observe them, in human fashion, from beginning to end.[146]

By observing the commandments in human fashion, Christ fulfilled and demonstrated the purpose of the Incarnation—he showed to humankind that it was possible to keep the commandments and to uphold true love even in the face of death. In doing so he created a model which men should follow and which consists in indiscriminate love and benefaction toward all human beings, be they friends or enemies. In following this "purpose of the Lord,"[147] human beings enter into the very mode of existence of the Trinity itself, since in loving their enemies they reproduce the kenosis of the Son.[148]

Love and benefaction toward enemies frees one from negative dispositions, such as hate, grief, or anger,[149] and leads to the perfect love which implies the active good done to the enemy,[150] as it "does not split up the one nature of men."[151] Perfect love is the true human reflection of divine philanthropy, since it stems from the imitation of Christ, who uncompromisingly loved both God the Father and all humankind. Through such a

145. *Liber asceticus*, 8.

146. *Liber asceticus*, 10.

147. To know the purpose of the Lord, in fact, is the condition of loving one's enemies (ibid., 9). This purpose was made manifest by Christ as obedience to the Father until death in keeping with the commandment of love (ibid., 13).

148. See Garrigues, *La charité*, 194.

149. See *De charitate*, I.61.

150. See ibid., II.49.

151. Ibid., I.71.

loving disposition Christ defeated evil and gave humanity the chance to regain life in love.[152] This, Maximus believes, opens up the way to heaven:

> He who loves Christ, certainly imitates Him as much as he can. Thus Christ never ceased to do good to men; when he was treated with ingratitude and blasphemed, He was long-suffering; when He was struck by them and put to death, He endured, imputing evil to no one at all. These three are the works of love for neighbor apart from which the man deceives himself who says he loves Christ or has reached His kingdom. For He says: "Not the one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father." And this also: "He that loves me will also keep my commandments," and the rest.[153]

The imitation of Christ, therefore, does not simply imply an inactive form of love toward friends and enemies. Christ sacrificed himself out of his love for humanity, and so his love, in the ultimate sense, is sacrificial. As a result, imitating of Christ's philanthropy means ultimate, sacrificial, love for one's neighbor. This is the condition of dwelling in the divine, and it means caring for the other more than for one's own being, even if this might lead to death:

> The more he himself became a man by nature in his Incarnation, the more he deified us by grace, so that we would not only learn naturally to care for one another, and spiritually to love others as ourselves, but also like God to be concerned for others more than for ourselves, even to the point of proving that love to others by being ready to die voluntarily and virtuously for others.[154]

Maximus talks here about three types of love, which he arranges hierarchically—natural love, spiritual love, and love by grace. These correspond to the three laws, which can be understood in a double manner, namely, as referring to God's Incarnation and to the three states of human development. In the first sense, Maximus claims that God is incarnated (embodied) not just through the historical Incarnation in Christ, but also through the *logoi* of a created being and through Scripture.[155] Each of the three incarnations refers to a law where God's presence in the *logoi* of beings refers to the natural law, his embodiment in Scripture refers to scriptural law, and finally his historical Incarnation through the Son relates to the law of grace.[156]

152. See Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 175.

153. *De charitate*, IV.55.

154. *Ad Thalassium*, 64 (CCSG 22:237).

155. See *Ambiguorum liber* 33, 1285C–1288A.

156. See more on this in Thunberg, *Microcosms and Mediator*, 77–79; Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 291–314; Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 117–21; Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 66–67, also 214–24.

Applied to the question of love, it follows that love represents the contents and is a reflection of the incarnation in all three dimensions.

Laws corresponding to the threefold incarnation are then reflected on the level of human beings. Natural love represents the realization of natural law (φυσικὸς νόμος), by which the reason takes control over the senses from which stem divisions between those who share in a common, human nature. Spiritual love, as the manifestation of scriptural law (γραπτὸς νόμος), means the spiritual desire (πόθος πνευματικός) for solidarity between connatural beings. Finally, love by grace is the fulfillment of the law of grace (χάριτος νόμος) and implies the divine, deified state. The first, then, manifests through the sharing in being (εἶναι), the second leads to well-being (εὖ εἶναι),[157] and the third brings about "the permanence of eternal well-being [ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι]"[158] and displays "the supernatural and supereessential Archetype in human nature."[159] In this way love gains ontological value as the central element in the three stages of human development,[160] shown through being, well-being, and eternal well-being, and ordered by the three laws of nature, Scripture, and grace. Furthermore, the relationship between the threefold incarnation and the threefold human road to deification, as reflected through the three laws, demonstrates once again the complementarity of divine incarnation and human deification, both of which mirror one another in love. This is particularly clear with regard to the sacrificial love for neighbor, in that loving self-forgetfulness and self-abandonment imitate the philanthropic kenosis of the Son.

The constant emphasis on human love as the image of God's love shows the importance of this concept in Maximus. Through this reciprocity, God and man exchange their properties and names, which is the sign of perfect love: "For it is the most perfect work of love and the goal of its activity, to contrive through the mutual exchange of what is related that the names and properties of those that have been united through love should be fitting to each other. So the human being is made God, and God is called and appears as human."[161] Love is therefore applied to both God and man, as both are at the same time lovers and beloved ones, as in the real and perfect loving union, they belong to each other through "mutual exchange."

157. See *Ad Thalassium*, 64 (CCSG 22:235).

158. Ibid. (CCSG 22:237).

159. Ibid.

160. "Love is the natural development of human existence and of being in the image of God" (Matsoukas, *La vie en Dieu*, 278).

161. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 401B.

Applying love to God and man unfolds through several aspects. In God, love defines the inner life of the Godhead-Trinity, and it is manifested as his love for the creation. On the level of man, love comes to light in several dimensions, one of which is negative and comes down to self-love as the origin of all vices. In the positive sense, love operates in a twofold manner, that is, in relation to God, and in relation to the rest of the creation. However, these two levels are revealed in a manifold manner: love cleanses the soul of passions and vices, and leads toward the ascetic life; it serves as a guide to help the mind acquire knowledge of God; it brings human beings together in communion,[162] and incites selfless acts; finally, it serves as the vehicle on one's way to God, that is, it becomes the agent of one's salvation and deification. In putting all these dimensions together, it becomes possible to grasp how love permeates Maximus's triadology, ontology, psychology, epistemology, moral philosophy, and soteriology, thereby presenting itself as one of the central motifs in his entire thought.

162. Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology*, 143, writes: "One can love himself only with the others, not without them. One can love himself only as a gift to the others as well as he loves the others as gifts to him."

CHAPTER FIVE BEAUTY

In the chapter on beauty in Dionysius the Areopagite, three terms denoting beauty came to light—κάλλος (and its derivatives), ὡραιότης, and εὐπρέπεια. The same three terms appear in Maximus as well, but unlike Dionysius, Maximus does not have a systematic approach to the treatment of beauty; rather, his thoughts on the subject are scattered throughout his works, and so his use of these terms is not as uniform as in the Areopagite. Nevertheless, Maximus does offer enough material for a solid insight into his understanding of the concept of beauty.[1] In order to grasp the relation between the Confessor's ideas on beauty and the terms he uses, I have decided to structure this chapter terminologically, that is, to examine each term in a separate section, which will hopefully, ultimately, allow me to draw some more general conclusions.

Κάλλος

Maximus, in line with other Christian thinkers, firmly believes in creation out of nothing, through which God is affirmed as the omnipotent creator who does not need a pre-existent material from which to create. "God brought beings *into existence* out of nothing,"[2] says Maximus, and goes on to acknowledge the crucial role of God's will in creating "out of

1. Some attempts have been made to explore this issue: see Michael D. Gibson, "The Beauty of the Redemption of the World: The Theological Aesthetics of Maximus the Confessor and Jonathan Edwards," *Harvard Theological Review* 101, no. 1 (2008): 45–76; and Ketevan Bezarashvili, "The Interrelation of the Theological Concepts of Divine Love, Beauty and Contemplation in the Writings of Maximus the Confessor and Shota Rustaveli," in *Maximus the Confessor and Georgia*, ed. T. Mgaloblishvili and L. Khoperia (London: Bennett & Bloom, 2009), 133–50. These studies, however, are comparative and therefore do not focus on Maximus's idea of beauty itself.

2. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1077C.

nothing the substance of the visible and invisible worlds."[3] This idea claims the absolute superiority of God over and beyond everything created. All creatures are created according to the *logoi* which are pre-existent ideas, or good wills,[4] contained in the Logos. Although these *logoi* are principles of created and differentiated beings, they also contain the divine purpose of beings, present in the Logos, who "wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of his embodiment."[5] In this way every person becomes a portion of God through the *logos* contained in his or her being.[6] As the embodiment of the Logos and as a portion of God, the created world is a specific manifestation of God. In addition, since all beings are created, that is, caused, by God, they reveal God, in that effects reveal their causes. The *logoi* are therefore the principles by which beings participate in God (or rather his activity), and in this way God is present in each thing, since each being contains a corresponding *logos*.[7] All *logoi* are contained in the universal Logos, the Word of God, through the gradual participation of particular *logoi* in the more universal *logoi*. In this way the Logos draws all beings to himself and effects a communion between them:

> And simply, to speak concisely, the principles [*logoi*] of whatever is separated and particular are, as they say, contained by the principles of what is universal and generic, and the more generic and more universal principles are held together by wisdom, whereas the principles of particulars, which are contained in various ways by those of the generic terms, are encompassed by prudence, according to which, having first been simplified and divested of the symbolic diversity they acquire in lower material things, are made one by wisdom, having received the natural affinity that leads to identity through the more generic principles. But the Wisdom and Prudence of God the Father is the Lord Jesus Christ, who through the power of wisdom sustains the universals of beings, and through the prudence of understanding embraces the parts from which they are completed, since he is by nature Creator and Provider of all things, and through himself draws into one those that are separated, dissolving strife among beings, and binding together all things in peaceful friendship and undivided concord, both in heaven and on earth, as the divine apostle says.[8]

3. Ibid., 1080A.

4. See *Ad Thalassium*, 13 (CCSG 7:95); *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1085AB. *Logoi* had already been defined as divine and good acts of will by Dionysius in DN V.8, 824C.

5. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1084D. I have already mentioned Maximus's concept of the threefold incarnation (or embodiment) of Logos in the *logoi* of created beings, in the Scriptures, and in the historical incarnation of Christ (ibid., 33, 1285C–1288A).

6. See *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1084D.

7. See more detail in Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 127–30.

8. *Ambiguorum liber* 41, 1313AB.

Thus, God gives existence to beings, makes himself present in beings through their *logoi*, unites them with other beings of the same nature, and, finally, unites all things in himself.[9] The theory of *logoi*, therefore, exemplifies Maximus's vision of the great harmony of the cosmos centered around and united with God.

The presence of God in all beings, and their participation in his activity through their *logoi*, does not, however, imply that the very essence of God can be comprehended, since "by its nature the uncreated cannot be contained by any created thing, nor can the unlimited be circumscribed as an object of thought by things that are limited."[10] The divine essence remains super-ineffable and super-unknowable. Nevertheless, the "intimations" of God offer to human beings a certain understanding of him, which is reached through cataphatic theology, a method which Maximus understands as being differentiated into modes of activity, providence, and judgment. What is of particular interest for our purpose here is the mode of activity: "The mode [concerned with activity, κατ' ἐνέργειαν], starting from the beauty and magnitude of creatures, introduces the explanation that the God of all is the fashioner, this shown through the radiant garments of the Lord, which the Word [Logos] shows to be the manifestation of creatures."[11]

The cataphatic method κατ' ἐνέργειαν therefore originates from the activity of God present in the created world. The beauty and magnitude of creatures point to the beauty and magnitude of their creator, who becomes immanent in the world through his activity. This divine activity should be understood as a manifestation of God's power through which he makes himself present in the world; and so in this way also the *logoi* of beings are activities, as are the acts of divine will.[12] Closely connected to the idea of God's imparting of himself through *logoi* of being is the doctrine of creation in the image and likeness of God, a viewpoint to which Maximus firmly adheres. While human beings are created in the image of God, their likeness to him is yet to be attained, through salvation and deification "whereby God himself will be 'all in all' alike to those who are saved and he will be seen [ἐμπρέπων] as Cause and as archetypal beauty,"[13] in those who

9. See Perl, *Methexis*, 171.

10. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1168B.

11. Ibid. The radiant garments of the Lord refer to the Transfiguration of Christ, when his face and garments shone (Mt 17:2).

12. While it is true that *logoi* are activities, not all divine activities are *logoi*. See Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 169–71.

13. *Mystagogia*, 24 (CCSG 69:64–65).

attain a befitting agreement (συμπρέπουσι) in likeness with him through virtue and knowledge.[14]

In commenting why all of Judah and Jerusalem showered glory and honor on Hezekiah, Maximus explains that this transpired as a result of his intelligible knowledge, through which he was above all the *logoi* of beings, and he was given honor because of his freedom from passions and natural movement.[15] Maximus then continues: "Those who particularly love beauty might say that glory is the highest beauty of the image [κατ' εἰκόνα κάλλος], and that honor is the unchanged imitation of the likeness: the contemplation in truth of the spiritual *logoi* produces the former, while the rigorous and guileless practice of the commandments produces the latter."[16] Human beings are created in the image of God, and that image is characterized by beauty which reaches its highest expression through the contemplation of *logoi* as the imparting of God the Creator. Those who cherish and act according to their *logoi* simultaneously develop and elevate their beauty as the manifestation of God, who is the archetype of the image.[17] Maximus clarifies this point by describing the Christ-Logos as the intelligible David:

> He is the shepherd of those who pursue practical philosophy and share, as food, natural contemplation, and he is the king of those who, in accordance with spiritual laws and *logoi*, restore, in returning to the Archetype, the beauty of the image [εἰκόνος τὸ κάλλος] given to them, and who, without intermediary, cling intellectually [κατὰ νοῦν] around the great King of ages himself, and mirror, so to say, the unapproachable beauty [τὸ ἀπρόσιτον κάλλος].[18]

Practical philosophy, in conjunction with natural contemplation, characterizes those who are in accordance with their *logoi*; and it is in this way that they return to the beautiful archetype of their beautiful image. *Logoi* are therefore a reflection of inaccessible beauty at the level of created beings, who for their part act as mirrors for this unapproachable beauty.[19] In a passage cited in the previous chapter, Maximus talks about love as

14. Note the linguistic resonance of ἐμπρέπων and συμπρέπουσι with κάλλος.

15. See *Ad Thalassium*, 53 (CCSG 7:435). Obviously glory and honor here correspond to contemplation and praxis.

16. Ibid.

17. See *Capita gnostica*, I.13: "The one who has illumined his mind with the divine thoughts, who has accustomed his reason to honor ceaselessly the Creator with divine hymns, and who has sanctified his sense with uncontaminated images has added to the natural beauty of the image the voluntary good of likeness."

18. *Ad Thalassium*, 53 (CCSG 7:433).

19. See *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1084B: "In God the *logoi* of beautiful things are steadfastly fixed."

the door to the Trinity, and entry through this door makes one "worthy to behold the unapproachable beauty [τὸ ἀπρόσιτον κάλλος] of the holy and Royal Trinity."[20] The example given of such worthiness is Moses, who was allowed to enter the cloud where God resided and to receive knowledge of time and nature. This was permitted to him, because "taking God himself as the type and exemplar of the virtues, he modeled himself on him, like a picture expertly capturing the likeness of the archetype."[21] The supernal beauty of God and the restored beauty of creatures, together with image–archetype language, testify to the highly aesthetic understanding of the God–creation relationship.

The idea that the present world is a reflection of the beauty of a higher, ideal reign goes back, of course, to the ancient Greek philosophical tradition; and this is certainly not alien to Maximus. He does not, however, consider the created world as a worthless copy of the celestial realm, but gives a Christian (and somewhat Neoplatonic) dimension to it, according to which the entire cosmos and beings within it bear a glimpse of God's beauty precisely because by him they were created.[22] The beauty of the world is, in fact, a testimony to God the Creator[23] and to God's providence: "For who, in contemplating the beauty and the magnificence of creation, does not immediately understand that God is the one who has brought all creatures into existence, since he is the Origin and Cause and Creator of all beings?"[24] This beauty in the creation is reflected in its analogy, good order and right measure, all of which are proof of God's creative and providential power. Maximus offers a description of this beautiful world which is worth quoting in full:

> Having thus understood creation, including its harmonious arrangement [εὐκοσμία], relations of analogy [ἀναλογία], and the benefit each part gives to the whole; and seeing that all things are perfect, having been wisely and providentially created in accordance with the principle [λόγος] of their creation, and that all that has come into being could not be better [καλῶς] ordered than it is now (since it has no need of any addition or subtraction), the saints learned of the Creator's existence from the things created by him. So too, when they saw the permanence of things, each abiding in a particular order [τάξις] and position [θέσις], and their

20. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 404A.

21. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1117C.

22. See also, for example, Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, trans. E. P. Meijering (Leiden: Brill, 1984), IV: "The body has eyes to see creation and to know the Creator through this harmonious order."

23. See, for example, Plotinus: "We hold that all the loveliness of this world comes by communion in Ideal-Form" (*Enneads*, I.6.2).

24. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1176D.

form of existence, whereby all things, each according to its own kind, remain distinct and free from all confusion; and when they considered the undeviating movement of the stars, and the cycle of the year, which proceeds in an orderly manner according to the periodic departure and return of the stars from and to their original place; and the yearly balance of nights and days, with their mutual increase and decrease, with neither being in excess or deficiency of the proper measure, they believed that the one whom they had come to know as God and Creator of all beings is also their Provider.[25]

The expressions which Maximus uses—εὐκοσμία, ἀναλογία, τάξις, θέσις—show that he is wholly conversant with the ancient philosophical, as well as Christian traditions preceding him, and that he relies upon them both terminologically and contextually. He sees the cosmos as a well-arranged order which gives proper position and proportion to each of its constituents.[26] Such a cosmic arrangement is due to the wise and "logical" providence of God. As a showcase for God's power to create beautiful things, the world is an invitation to go beyond, to search for the fashioner of such beauty, who is the real and ultimate object of desire, in whom the principles of the world are contained, since the immense beauty of created things implies that the exquisiteness of their creator is even greater. Maximus explains this by means of the gradations between the visible and invisible worlds:

God established the invisible world and the one that we see. . . . Now if the visible world is so beautiful [καλός], of what sort then will the invisible be? And if this latter is better, how much more so God who founded them both? If then the artificer of all that is beautiful [ὁ πάντων δημιουργὸς τῶν καλῶν] is better than all creatures, what reason has the mind for leaving what is best of all to be engrossed in the worst of all? I mean the passions of the flesh.[27]

The beauty of the created world is therefore, for Maximus, just the initial step, a departing point, on the road to God as the fashioner of all that is beautiful. If the mind's admiration is captured only by visible things, then it does not fulfil its purpose and fails to recognize true beauty: "The beauty of creatures, when not beheld for the glory of their Creator, inevitably deprives the beholders of their rational devotion to the Word."[28] What Maximus is

25. Ibid., 1176BC.

26. Not only is the world beautifully arranged, but also Scripture, as it is the written word of God and one of his embodiments. So Maximus speaks of "the beautiful arrangement [καλὴ εὐταξία] of divine Scripture" (*Ad Thalassium*, 10 [CCSG 7:83]).

27. *De charitate*, III.72.

28. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1129D.

looking for is beauty itself as the ultimate satisfaction of desire and the end of movement. He discusses this idea at length in an anti-Origenistic passage:

> If, on the other hand, they [opponents] should say that . . . these rational beings were able, but not willing (to abide in the Beautiful), then the Beautiful would of necessity be loved not for its own sake, but because of its opposite, as if it were not something naturally or properly desirable in and of itself. For whatever is not good and desirable in itself, and that does not attract all motion to itself, strictly speaking cannot be the Beautiful. Neither would it be capable of satisfying the desire of those who find delight in it.[29]

Beauty that is defined and determined by something else is not true beauty—it is not beauty in itself, and it does not represent the end of desire's movement.[30] If the opposite were true, it would lead to the paradoxical conclusion that evil teaches one how to recognize the good and cling to beauty.[31] The first man was deceived into believing that he could find delight in a form of beauty other than the divine, and so he acted irrationally by turning his mind away from the true beauty of God, thus becoming a slave to physical passions: "By not wishing to be nourished by the Word, the first man fell away from divine life, and embarked upon a different life which engenders death, a life in which he acquired for himself an irrational form, obscuring the inconceivable divine beauty, and he handed over all creation as food for death."[32]

Acquiring and admiring true beauty is therefore a rational operation; the falling away from that beauty was an irrational move which brought about the mortality of human nature, whereby man "had been brought into being by God, resplendent beauty of incorruptibility and immortality,"[33] but he preferred material things over "intellective beauty [νοερός κάλλος]," and in this way he became subordinate to death and passions, which introduced instability and disorder.[34] Even the soul was affected by this state which caused it to undo its primary beauty and beautiful spiritual uniformity.[35] Therefore, human nature needs to be returned to the "very beauty for which it was created in the beginning and in which it was thoroughly

29. Ibid., 7, 1069CD.

30. On the topic of the beautiful as the desirable in itself, see also Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, XII.7, 1072AB. Cf. Christopher P. Long, *Aristotle on the Nature of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 214–15.

31. See *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1069D–1072A.

32. Ibid., 10, 1157A.

33. Ibid., 8, 1104A.

34. Ibid.

35. See *Ad Thalassium*, 47 (CCSG 7:319).

secure."[36] The task that stands before man, then, is to restore his logical existence to the "primordial magnitude and beauty of nature"[37] and to direct his mind to God and his unapproachable beauty. In aesthetic terms, man's calling involves reviving creation and turning it from disharmony to harmony, from disorder to order—from ugliness to beauty. This task is not just an intellectual endeavor, but has ethical implications as well. These include ascetic practice, through the abandonment of the carnal passions[38] and a virtuous life: "And it was with a view to these [God's attributes] that the saints wisely modeled themselves, and owing to their expert imitation they now bear the distinguishing characteristic—manifest through the virtues—of the hidden and invisible beauty of the divine magnificence."[39]

God makes himself present in the world through his attributes, and in this way he becomes the model of the virtuous life, which leads to the vision of supernal beauty. This is the beauty which astonishes, the beauty that "wounds" the beholder and incites him to emulate it, in order to be "adorned [καλλωπιζόμενος] with the proper modes of virtues through noble action."[40] Practicing the virtues leads to the good use of the senses,[41] through which the soul becomes beautified with divine splendors,[42] and it is thus able to create a universe of spiritual beauty: "If the soul, in drawing on its own powers, makes proper use of the senses, singling out the manifold principles of beings, and being able wisely to transfer to itself the whole of what it sees—in which God is concealed and silently proclaimed—it will have succeeded in creating by the mind's power of free choice a superlatively beauteous and spiritual world within itself."[43]

The right perception of the *logoi* of beings therefore means the construction of a spiritual world which is characterized by spiritual beauty. The soul can achieve this by practicing the four cardinal virtues (prudence, courage, temperance, and justice), which in combination form the structure of the spiritually constructed world. Such a world is not an imagined

36. *Ambiguorum liber* 42, 1321A.

37. *Ad Thalassium*, 26 (CCSG 7:185).

38. Similarly, Plotinus (*Enneads*, I.6.5) writes that "when emancipated from all the passions, purged of all that embodiment has thrust upon it," then "the ugliness that came only from the alien is stripped away."

39. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1205A.

40. Ibid., 1152A.

41. Maximus claims that the senses are elements for the powers of the soul, in that every sense corresponds to a power of the soul—sight is the image of the intellect, hearing of reason, smell is the symbol of anger, taste of desire, and touch is the image of vital power (ibid., 21, 1248BC).

42. See *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1112D.

43. Ibid., 21, 1248C.

ideal or the construct of a delusional mind: it is the same real world, but perceived not just as a physical reality, but also as the place "in which God is hidden and proclaimed in silence." Precisely because of God's presence, the material world gains a spiritual quality through which it can reflect spiritual beauty. This beauty becomes "visible" and understandable to the soul through her practice of virtues. Moreover, the beauty of the spiritually constructed world and man's becoming beautiful through the practice of virtues are ideas that bear witness to the deep interpenetration of the aesthetic and ethical components of Maximus's thought—both ethics and aesthetics are here positioned in an interplay which results in a state of peace and immateriality that is beyond speech and demonstration. This state is the highest achievement of the apophatic method of epistemology, in which one goes beyond reason to attain God, and then "he no longer bears about with him anything natural or written, since everything that he could read or know is now utterly transcendent and wrapped in silence."[44]

Ὡραιότης

The use of the term ὡραιότης is much less frequent in Maximus than the use of κάλλος. In most cases, these terms are synonymous, but in some occurrences they are combined in one phrase. According to Maximus, God is revealed by the *logoi* of created beings, and to human beings he grants the chance, through visible realities, of finding the path toward him. This is the work of the highest Goodness:

> Not only did the divine and incorporeal essences of intelligible things constitute representations of God's ineffable glory, acquiring legitimately and proportionately within themselves the whole incomprehensible loveliness of inapproachable beauty [ἀπερινόητον ὡραιότητα τοῦ ἀπροσίτου κάλλους], but, in addition, traces of God's own majesty intermingled [ἐγκαταμίξαι] with sensible things, things that fall far short of intelligible essences. These traces of God's majesty are able to transport the human mind, which uses them as a vehicle, infallibly to God.[45]

Here we encounter once again Maximus's understanding of the three laws, or the three embodiments, of God. In the above passage he treats the natural law or God's embodiment in nature, operating through the *logoi* of creatures, which are then considered as carriers of a portion of wisdom and

44. Ibid., 10, 1153C.
45. *Ad Thalassium*, 51 (CCSG 7:395).

truth and which serve as a sort of educational tool, thanks to the human capacity to perceive. It is a way in which God cares providentially for creatures, since he leads them through figures and sensible things adequate for human nature. In addition, he "has mingled [ἐγκατέμιξεν] himself with all these figures that were given to the ancient people, therein bringing about the ascent of those whom he is training [οἱ παιδαγωγουμένοι]."[46] "Intelligible things" have already acquired the "incomprehensible loveliness of inapproachable beauty," while human beings need to be trained and to have ascended in order to grasp it accordingly. Training and education are needed because, as Maximus puts it, evil is ignorance of the Cause, and this ignorance estranges man from real knowledge of the divine. It primarily hits the senses, since man is bound to them by his corporeal existence, which ultimately induces him to be oblivious of God and to deify visible things: "Naturally, those who are henceforth mistaken about the intelligible beauty of the divine loveliness [νοητός κάλλος τῆς θείας ὡραιότητος], they consider visible creation to be God, and so they deify it because of the use they make of it for the sustaining of the body."[47] The task, then, is to gaze at divine beauty, to learn the *logoi* of beings and to ascend to God. This is not a purely intellectual operation but stands in between the sensible and the intelligible; consequently, it belongs to the soul, as the border between the mind and the senses:

> In fact, the knowledge of sensible things is not completely removed from the intelligible [noetic] faculty, nor is it completely assigned to the sensual activity; it is, in a way, in the middle of the passage from the mind to the sense, and from the sense to the mind, and it forms the union of the two, shaped by the forms of sensible realities in relation to the sense, and, in relation to the mind, by transposing the figures [τύποι] of the forms into *logoi*. That is why the knowledge of visible things is rightly called a "river flowing through the middle of the city," since it is an interval between the two extremes, that is, between mind and sense.[48]

Natural contemplation, through which one gets to know visible things, is therefore a middle point in man's ascent. The argument that Maximus wishes to make here is that this path does start with sensible things, but it must not stop there. If the perception of sensible things does not lead to recognizing the *logoi* of these things, then the soul does not fulfil its task. The knowledge of *logoi* leads to the Logos and to the knowledge of him as

46. Ibid., 31 (CCSG 7:223).
47. Ibid., prol. (CCSG 7:35).
48. Ibid., 49 (CCSG 7:363).

the maker and the cause of everything created, in whom all the *logoi* are contained. The soul is able to apprehend these only when its faculties are harmonized and united, thus producing love:

> It is therefore love that is the result of the assembly in one point around the divine, and of the union of the soul's powers, that is, the rational power, the irascible power, and the concupiscible power. Love inscribes the beauty of the divine loveliness [τὸ τῆς θείας ὡραιότητος κάλλος] into the memory of those who have already been graced with the equality of honor with God . . . , and in this way they unforgettably possess the desire of the soul which inscribes and imprints into its guiding part the undefiled beauty [ἀκήρατος κάλλος] of divine love.[49]

Divine beauty attracts the soul and incites her desire, but the end is reached only through the appropriate interplay between action and contemplation, through which the soul cuts off the passions and defeats ignorance. Finally, the soul can be granted access to a proportionate vision of beauty:

> "From thee cometh victory,"[50] which shows the end of the active life, which is the victory over the passions and the reward for the divine battles against sin; and: "from thee cometh wisdom," which shows the end of the contemplative life, due to the knowledge, of course, which suppresses all the ignorance of the soul; and: "thine is the glory," glory is the name of the beauty of the divine loveliness [τὸ κάλλος τῆς θείας ὡραιότητος], which is manifested as far as it is allowed [κατὰ τὸ θεμιτὸν]. Such is the union of victory and wisdom, of praxis and contemplation, of virtue and knowledge, of goodness and truth. United one to another they radiate the unique glory and brightness of God.[51]

Here, Maximus powerfully shows the significance of the two ways of life and the results they produce. Πράξις means a good and virtuous life[52] which defeats passions, while θεωρία brings about wisdom and knowledge in the search for truth. The combination of πράξις and θεωρία, that is, their union, leads to perfection and represents the method of ascent which allows divine beauty to be discovered and reflected. Man's chance to ascend

49. *Ad Thalassium*, 49 (CCSG 7:353–55).

50. Maximus comments on the story of Zorobabel in the first book of *Esdras*: "Now when this young man was gone forth, he lifted up his face to heaven toward Jerusalem, and praised the King of heaven, and said, From thee cometh victory, from thee cometh wisdom, and thine is the glory, and I am thy servant."

51. *Ad Thalassium*, 54 (CCSG 7:447).

52. Cf. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, in *Xenophon in Seven Volumes* (London: Heinemann, 1979), VII.43: "For it is not through outward comeliness [ὡραιότης] that the sum of things good and beautiful [καλά τε κἀγαθά] is increased in the world, but by the daily practice of the virtues."

to God and to reflect his beauty is nothing else but deification itself, which culminates in the balance of πράξις and θεωρία.[53]

In explaining how "the beautiful arrangement [καλὴ εὐταξία] of the divine Scriptures" describes different stages of the progression from multiplicity to divine unity, Maximus elaborates on three groups of people, each of which belongs to a certain stage of ascent—the fearers, the proficient, and the perfect. Of these three, only the last group has access to unmixed divine visions: "But those who have already been mystically made worthy of contemplative theology, who dedicate their mind purified of all material imagination and their uninterrupted imitation as the bearer of the full image of divine beauty [θεία ὡραιότης], those are for us 'lovers.'"[54]

The same idea is repeated by Maximus in the *Mystagogy*, where the three groups are called slaves, mercenaries, and sons. Slaves observe the commandments out of fear, mercenaries do it because of the promise of future benefits, and sons are those who are never separated from God on account of their character and habit of the voluntary disposition of their soul: "They have become as much as possible by deification in grace what God is and is believed by nature and by cause."[55] Bearing in mind that the voluntary disposition of the soul is one of Maximus's definitions of love, it becomes understandable why the last group is referred to as "lovers." Clearly, in both passages, Maximus speaks of threefold spiritual development through πρακτικὴ φιλοσοφία (or πράξις), φυσικὴ φιλοσοφία (or θεωρία), and μυστικὴ θεολογία (or simply θεολογία).[56] The last stage of this development, mystical theology, unites man with God and makes him the "bearer of the full image of the divine beauty"; this beauty, reflected in human nature, is restored through salvation as the purpose of incarnation, which Maximus explains by etymologically analyzing Nineveh:

> For Nineveh is translated "parched blackness" and "smoothest beauty." In harmony with its etymological significance, therefore, the Lord, through his three-day burial and resurrection, destroyed the "parched blackness" of sin that has accrued to human nature through its transgression, and renewed the "smoothest beauty" of that nature through the obedience of faith. He furthermore displayed the "smoothest" beauty [ὡραιότης] of all in human nature, that of the incorruptibility granted through resurrection, a beauty in no way coarsened by materiality. He suited this beauty that I have described to our shared human nature, to the Holy Church,

53. See Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 204–5.
54. *Ad Thalassium*, 10 (CCSG 7:83–85).
55. *Mystagogia*, 24 (CCSG 69:66).
56. See a thorough discussion in Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 332–68.

and even to the individual human soul thus ridded through faith and a good conscience of the *earthly image* of the old Adam, and clothed in the *heavenly image*.[57]

The destruction of sin and the renunciation of materiality signify the renewal of human nature, which as a result becomes resplendent with beauty. It also means that by divesting itself of its earthly image and clothing itself in a heavenly one, the soul enters into mystical union with God. In this union, Matsoukas concludes, "human beings and all rational creatures become Godlike persons, gifted with divine beauty and likeness to God, in their movement toward the realization of their final perfection."[58]

Εὐπρέπεια

The distraction of the soul, which prevents man's communion with God, lies in material objects, the forms of visible realities. If it were not for them, the devil could do no harm to the soul; however, he knows that the soul is naturally bound to material things, so he uses material representations to "throw" the appearances and forms of sensible things at the soul. In this way "the sense … becomes an evil and deadly weapon frequently used by the devil for the destruction of the divine comeliness [θεία εὐπρέπεια] of the soul, thus delivering our rational power entirely to the enemy, through the cajolery of pleasure."[59] The beauty of the soul consists therefore in her proper well-arranged order, which means the rule of the rational element over the two passible elements.[60] That is why Maximus uses the term εὐπρέπεια, which has the connotation of order, and often means fitness or well-ordered beauty.[61] When the good arrangement of the soul's faculties is preserved, then its beauty is preserved as well; but when the soul becomes enslaved to material pleasures and dives into materiality, then the ruling part of the soul, the rational element, is delivered to the enemy. This abuse of the well-ordered arrangement of the soul results in the destruction of its beauty.

The right disposition of the soul and its abandonment of materiality are

57. *Ad Thalassium*, 64 (CCSG 22:231). See also Maximus's elaboration on Nineveh as the three-day journey in which he sees the metaphor for the three laws of nature, scripture, and grace in ibid., 64 (CCSG 22: 235–39).

58. Matsoukas, *La vie en Dieu*, 294.

59. *Ad Thalassium*, 49 (CCSG 7:361).

60. See, for example, ibid., 61 (CCSG 22:85).

61. For example, Plato applies it to rhetoric. Cf. Plato, *Phaedr*us, 274B: "But we have still to speak of propriety [εὐπρέπεια] and impropriety [ἀπρέπεια] in writing, how it should be done [καλῶς] and how it is improper [ἀπρεπῶς], have we not?"

achieved through stages of spiritual development. In a toponymic metaphor, Maximus says that the person who pursues practical philosophy lives in Joppa, while the one who lives on Zion is a gnostic: "The one who lives in Joppa is therefore a practical man, and he examines the means provided for ousting the contrary realities; and the one who lives on Zion is a gnostic man, and he intellectually [κατὰ νοῦν] examines the sole beauty of divine realities [μόνην τῶν θείων θεωρῶν τὴν εὐπρέπειαν]."[62] The person who has cut himself off from the passions and turned his attention away from material things contemplates intelligible things and reflects the divine realities which leave imprints in the guiding part of his soul. He thus reaches the height of knowledge and is able to grasp the intelligible, well-arranged beauty of divine realities. A model of such an abandonment of sensible things is Abraham:

> After having seen, with the pure eye of faith, the beauty [εὐπρέπεια] of the goods to come, he arduously obeyed the order to leave his land, his relatives, and his father's house, in order to abandon the relation to and propensity toward the flesh, the senses, and the sensible realities; thus he was above nature in the moment of trial and struggles, because he honored the Cause more than nature.[63]

The abandonment of the sensible not only means the cutting off of oneself from the passions and turning away from carnal pleasure or other earthly attachments; the right path to knowledge also entails going beyond physical things, even with regard to the words of the Scriptures or the garments of Christ. Thus, it is not only the ascetic life which should be put into practice, but also the intellectual anagogy through which man ascends to the reality of God:

> In this case we unwisely are satisfied with the words of Scripture in place of the Word, and the Word slips out of the mind while we thought by holding on to his garments we could possess the incorporeal Word. In a similar way did the Egyptian woman lay hold not of Joseph but of his clothing, and the men of old who remained permanently in the beauty of visible things [εὐπρέπεια τῶν ὁρωμένων] and mistakenly worshipped the creature instead of the Creator.[64]

The visible world is indeed beautiful and well-arranged, revealing God to a certain extent, just as Scripture does. Using an ecclesiological metaphor, Maximus claims that the church is a symbol of the sensible

62. *Ad Thalassium*, 27 (CCSG 7:199).
63. Ibid., 49 (CCSG 7:313).
64. *Capita gnostica*, II.73.

world, "since it possesses the divine sanctuary as heaven and the beauty [εὐπρέπεια] of the nave as earth." In addition, the world is a church, because "it possesses heaven corresponding to a sanctuary, and for a nave it has the adornment [διακόσμησιν] of the earth."[65] By corresponding the sanctuary with heaven, and the nave with the adornment of the earth, Maximus clearly suggests the undeniable natural unity of the sensible and intelligible world whereby the unbreakable bond between the Church and the created world is precisely analogous with the unbreakable bond between sensible and intelligible—thus, Maximus stresses the iconic character of the Church and insists on its symbolic circumscription of man and the world. Furthermore, Maximus's use of the terms εὐπρέπεια and διακόσμησις points to his understanding of the Church and the world as well-arranged and ordered entities. Here he comes close to Athanasius, who claims that the order of the world's arrangement (τάξις τῆς διακοσμήσεως) points to God, its ruler and governor.[66]

What Maximus warns against, however, is satisfaction with the visible and physical, a satisfaction which, if one stops at that point, cannot lead to knowledge of God. The error which must be avoided and overcome is remaining permanently engaged with mere words and things; instead, they should be considered as initial steps, or starting points, which ought to be negotiated in order to reach the truth. The knowledge of God, in fact, goes beyond sense and is hidden in spiritual wisdom. In order to reach this knowledge, one must combine the practical and contemplative stages of life, just like Elijah in the cave at Horeb, which means that the true search for God includes both virtue and contemplation, or, metaphorically, "not only on Horeb, that is, as an ascetic in the practice of the virtues, but also in the cave of Horeb, that is, as a contemplative in the hidden place of wisdom which can exist only in the habit of the virtues."[67]

A few conclusions can be drawn from the previous exposition. Maximus's vision of the cosmos and God was deeply involved with concepts which we regard as aesthetic. He emphasizes the unapproachable, inaccessible, supernal beauty of the Godhead by using both κάλλος and ὡραιότης, and sometimes the combination of the two, such as κάλλος τῆς ὡραιότητος or ὡραιότης τοῦ κάλλους. The fact that he uses these terms simultaneous-

65. *Mystagogia*, 3 (CCSG 69:17–18).

66. See Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, III.38. Dionysius is even more explicit in his affirmation of the well-ordered and arranged cosmos as hierarchically structured.

67. *Capita gnostica*, II.74.

ly and interchangeably indicates that he considers them synonymous—not without a basis in the tradition, chiefly in the works of Dionysius the Areopagite. If God is supernal and ineffable beauty, and if the world and creatures in it are created as a result of his will and in his image, then the entire cosmos bears a mark of beauty as the manifestation of its cause. This applies to the world in general, which is well-ordered and beautiful, as reflected in its εὐκοσμία, ἀναλογία, τάξις, and θέσις. However, the material aspect of the world, the aspect which is also beautiful, is not the beautiful in itself. As with Aristotle, Maximus would claim that the truly beautiful is that which is desirable in itself. Material things cannot be such, despite the physical pleasure they might procure. The only in-itself desirable, and therefore beautiful, is God himself, who is manifested through the beauty of creation, and through the beauty of Scriptures or laws, which are all nothing but invitations and educational tools useful for man's uplifting to the Creator.

This uplifting is achieved through the stages of the spiritual life, namely, practical philosophy and contemplation, which end in mystical theology and culminate in deification and union with divinity. On this journey, man is required to live an ascetic life and to uphold and practice the virtues; he also ought to detach himself from the material world, in order to be able to know the *logoi* of things and to contemplate only the beauty of divine realities, which moves him closer to God. In this process, not only does he behold inaccessible beauty, but he also makes himself more beautiful, as he models himself on the archetype from which he was created. This beauty which man enhances is spiritual and psychological, since the soul receives an imprint of the divine beauty in her rational, guiding principle, which then directs all psychic powers toward the acquisition of ineffable beauty. In this way both κάλλος and εὐπρέπεια can be applied to the soul, since she becomes both beautiful and well-arranged in the sense that her rational part rules over the passionate element. By establishing the desire for the truly beautiful, by practicing the virtues, and by learning the *logoi* of things, the soul creates an entirely virtuous and intellectual world, characterized by spiritual beauty. According to M. D. Gibson: "as the human contemplates the beauty of God, she moves continually away from earthly and mundane to the inner glory of God's triune being, in which she is destined to dwell."[68]

68. Gibson, "Beauty of the Redemption," 52–53.

Finally, through spiritual development and the interaction between the virtues and knowledge,[69] man will attain likeness to God, who will become present in those saved as the archetype of the beauty which they, as mirrors, reflect. The chief idea that emerges from Maximus's thoughts on beauty is the urge to go beyond simple appearances—to acknowledge the beauty of visible things, of course, but never to be satisfied with it, as there is a higher, ineffable, and infinite beauty which is the archetype of everything created. Beauty then, for Maximus, not only has aesthetic significance, but, through its connection to the practice of virtues, it also gains ethical value as well. Furthermore, as related to the knowledge of *logoi* of beings and of God, it becomes epistemologically relevant. As beauty reflected in the world and in creation, it gains cosmological and ontological value. As the character of the well-ordered soul, it plays an important role in psychology. And lastly, through its active role in man's ascent to and union with God, it takes on an anagogical and soteriological dimension.

69. Maximus's conception of spiritual development will be studied further in the following chapter on deification.

CHAPTER SIX DEIFICATION

As for Dionysius the Areopagite, deification is of crucial significance for Maximus, which is testified to by the abounding textual evidence concerning deification. In his terminology, Maximus relies on his predecessors, chiefly Dionysius, Gregory Nazianzen, and the other Cappadocians. Norman Russell has made the effort to individuate Maximus's terms denoting deification and their frequency, stating that the Confessor's preferred term is θέωσις, while he also uses ἐκθέωσις derived from Dionysius (and going back to Proclus), as well as ἀποθεόω and συνθεόω, both of which occur once. In addition to these, one also finds in Maximus θεοποιός, θεοποιητικός, and θεωτικός.[1] However, despite their diversity, all of these terms have the same meaning, and it is thus possible to draw a rather uniform outline of Maximus's doctrine of deification.

The "Logic"

By the "logic" of deification I refer to Maximus's famous theory of *logoi*, whose importance for deification I shall examine in this section. Much has been said about the theory of *logoi* in previous studies,[2] and some space has been dedicated to it in the preceding chapter. Therefore, suffice it to repeat here a few points of interest for the present discussion. In defining *logoi*, Maximus follows Dionysius the Areopagite and Clement of Alexandria by explicitly quoting their definitions of *logoi* as predeterminations and products of the divine will.[3] As a matter of fact, all beings are created in

1. See Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 263–64, and notes 28–32.

2. See Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 15–180; Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 73–80 and 400–18; Perl, *Methexis*, 147–80; Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 64–138.

3. See *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1085A.

accordance with the *logoi* contained in the Logos, and as such they are beings' principles and carry their divine purpose, since "in God the *logoi* of all things are steadfastly fixed, and it is on the basis of these that God is said to know all things before they come into being."[4] All creatures exist in potentiality, since their *logoi* are pre-existently contained in God, and they come into actual existence as the result of God's creative act, because they were not brought into being at the same time with being known by God, but "in the wisdom of the Creator, individual things were created at the appropriate moment in time, in a manner consistent with their *logoi*, and thus they received in themselves actual existence as beings."[5] This implies differences between beings, as each corresponds to an appropriate *logos*, but the *logoi* also denote a specific relationship between God and his creatures—*logoi* are the principles by which beings participate in God and in his activities, but they also show that God is present in each being.[6] In a more concise explanation, Maximus says that the *logoi* are the defining limits of beings.[7] The theory of *logoi* finds its place in the multiplication of the One and the unification of the many: one Logos is many *logoi*, which is seen in the uniqueness of each being;[8] and many *logoi* are One, because according to the procession the One goes forth into beings in a creative and preservative manner, while according to the reversion, the many are directed to the One in a providentially guided manner.[9] The *logos* therefore denotes, at the same time, the principle of being and its final end, both of which are in God. This idea of an "all-powerful center" that contains lines going out from it and gathers them all together has profound implications for human beings—because our *logoi* pre-exist in God, we are called a "portion of God," but also "we are said to have 'flowed down from above' because we have failed to move in a manner consistent with the *logos* according to which we were created and which preexists in God."[10] The purpose, therefore, of a being is to act in accordance with its *logos*, which means fulfilling one's own nature; and it is in fact a prerequisite for deification:

He comes to be *in* God through attentiveness, since he has not falsified the *logos* of being [εἶναι] that preexists in God; and he *moves* in God in accordance with

4. Ibid., 1081A.
5. Ibid.
6. See Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 127–30.
7. See *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1081B.
8. See ibid., 1077C.
9. See ibid., 1081C. The scheme procession–reversion is clear. See Perl, *Methexis*, 154–71, for the Neoplatonic sources of the *logoi* theory.
10. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1081C.

the *logos* of well-being [εὖ εἶναι] that preexists in God, since he is moved to action by the virtues; and he *lives* in God in accordance with the *logos* of eternal-being [ἀεὶ εἶναι] that also preexists in God. In this life he has already become one with himself and immovable, owing to his state of supreme impassibility, and in the age to come, through divinization which will be given to him, he will love and cleave affectionately to the aforementioned *logoi* that preexist in God, or rather he will love and cleave affectionately to God himself, in whom the *logoi* of beautiful things are steadfastly fixed.[11]

The three *logoi* mentioned here, namely, the *logos* of being, the *logos* of well-being, and the *logos* of eternal-being, represent one of the tripartite schemes often found in Maximus. One can quite easily grasp the comparative aspects of these triads when put together. Compared to the γένεσις/ κίνησις/ στάσις triad, the *logoi* triad (εἶναι/ εὖ εἶναι/ ἀεὶ εἶναι) explains the *logos* of being as creation (*is*, γένεσις), and the *logos* of well-being as movement (*moves*, κίνησις) toward the final rest (*lives*, στάσις) which is nothing but the life in God as the being's consummation. A similar comparison can be worked out in relation to the other two triads, namely, οὐσία/ δύναμις/ ἐνέργεια and ἀρχή/ μεσότης/ τέλος.[12] In this way the *logoi* triad lays down the ontological structure of a being, from its creation to its deification, so that it is implied that the creature's potential for deification is present in its nature, while the middle and last members of the triad point to the actualization of nature and its final fulfillment in deification. As Tollefsen argues, this shows how nature and deifying grace are distinguished but not separated.[13] Living in accordance with the *logos* restores the human being's definition as a portion of God:

He is a "portion of God" [μοῖρα θεοῦ], then, insofar as he exists, for he owes his existence to the *logos* of being that is in God; and . . . insofar as he is good, for he owes his goodness to the *logos* of well-being that is in God; and . . . insofar as he is God, owing to the *logos* of his eternal-being that is in God. In honoring these *logoi* and acting in accordance with them, he places himself wholly in God alone . . . so that he himself by grace is and is called God.[14]

To be a portion of God, therefore, means to accord one's own existence and action to the *logos*. This happens through three aspects which, as explained above, correspond to three members of the "logical" triad,

11. Ibid., 1084B.
12. See the chapter above on love in Maximus.
13. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 119.
14. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1084BC.

and develop from mere existence, pass through being good, and end in God himself. The realization of this path implies the being's disposition to voluntarily actualize its potentiality and imprint God on itself. This is a prerequisite on the part of the creation. However, this voluntary disposition is not all that it takes to be deified, as Maximus warns—it is only by grace that a human being "is God and is called God." This rather short passage, in fact, summarizes some of the more crucial aspects of deification as understood by the Confessor: 1) deification is made possible through the "onto-logical" structure of creation, which secures a being's potentiality for deification, as well as its ability to actualize it; 2) the path to deification leads through "imprinting and forming God alone" in oneself; 3) since deification is a given only in potentiality, and it is up to the being itself to actualize it, this implies a volitional moment on the part of the creature; and 4) finally, deification is realized only through grace. These points lead to the conclusion that deification for Maximus is not an event or a moment, but a process; furthermore, it is a process of cooperation between God and the being, as it does require a voluntary effort on the part of the creature, but it depends ultimately on grace. This means that God, as Maximus affirms, is the beginning, middle, and end in an active way, since he is "beginning as creator, middle as provider, and end as goal."[15] Thus, God appears as both the Creator and the deifier, since "he who is truly the Creator of the essence of created beings by nature had also to become the very Author of the deification of creatures by grace, in order that the Giver of well-being might appear also as the gracious Giver of eternal well-being."[16] The relationship between deification as the being's potential and deification as a divine gift is something to which the Confessor firmly holds to, and never misses to underline it:

> Each of the intellective and rational beings, whether angels or men, insofar as it has been created in accordance with the *logos* that exists in and with God, is and is called a "portion of God," precisely because of that *logos*, which, as we said, preexists in God. If such a being moves according to its *logos*, it comes to be in God—in whom its *logos* of being preexists—as its Origin and Cause. As long as it wishes and yearns to know nothing apart from its own origin, it does not flow away from God, but rather, in its upward movement toward God, it becomes God and is said to be a "portion" of God through its proper mode of participation in God, because, according to nature, wisely and rationally, and through a properly ordered move-

15. *Capita gnostica*, I.10.
16. *Ad Thalassium*, 60 (CCSG 22:79).

ment, it attains its own origin and cause, having nowhere else to be moved besides its own beginning, or beyond the ascent and restoration to the *logos* according to which it was created, nor any other way of being moved, since its movement toward the divine goal clearly takes as its final limit the divine goal itself.[17]

The deified state as potentiality preexisting in God is here clearly emphasized by Maximus: the *logos* is the divine idea of both creation and deification, as it relates to the beginning of being, as well as to its final end. However, this potentiality is to be actualized by the being itself, and this actualization is reflected through movement in accordance with the *logos*. Through this movement, the being is directed toward its own beginning and cause, which at the same time signals its end, and by moving toward the beginning, the being moves toward the end and reaches God as its final resting point.[18] The capacity of movement, then, seems to be an instrument given by God to the being's nature, in order to facilitate its coming closer to God, and thus the movement ceases only when the being reaches God as the one who is the beginning, the end, and the point of restoration of everything.[19] However, movement in accordance with the *logos* is something that depends on the creature, and it requires a voluntary action which introduces free will into the entire process:

> The principles of all the beings that exist essentially . . . or will exist in the future . . . preexist and are immovably fixed in God, and it is according to these that all things are, and have come to be, and remain always drawing closer to their own predetermined principles through natural motion, and ever more closely approximated to being by their particular kinds and degrees of motion and inclination of choice. They receive well-being through virtue and through their direct progress toward the principle according to which they exist; or they receive ill-being through vice and their movement contrary to the principle by which they exist.[20]

It is free will on which the movement's direction depends—the being can move in the direction of God or in the opposite direction, which translates into moving toward being or toward non-being. The latter condition is understood as "slipping down from above," which means that "though . . . a person had it well within his power to direct the footsteps of his soul to God, he freely chose to exchange what is better and real for what is inferior

17. *Ambiguorum liber 7*, 1080BC.

18. See ibid., 1084A: "For such a person freely and unfeignedly chooses to cultivate the natural seed of the Good, and has shown the end to be the same as the beginning."

19. See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 120.

20. *Ambiguorum liber 42*, 1329AB.

and nonexistent."[21] This kind of movement, though voluntary, is irrational and para-logical because it implies the abandonment of one's own beginning and cause, "according to which, by which, and for which, he came to be."[22] Significantly, Maximus thus introduces a rational aspect of deification—all rational beings, angels and human beings, are called "portions of God," and if they rely on wisdom and reason, they move toward God;[23] however, if they move irrationally, contrary to reason, they then abandon God and cause disorder and defects.[24] The exercise of the will is closely related to the very concept of humanity's creation in God's image and likeness. Maximus explains that every rational nature is created in the image of God, but only the good and the wise are made in his likeness, since being and ever-being are given to nature, while well-being is identified with goodness and wisdom[25] and is granted for fitness of will and judgment.[26] Therefore, being and ever-being correspond to the image, while goodness and wisdom (well-being) belong to the likeness. From this idea it follows that well-being depends on the willing aspect of beings, so that attaining well-being is related to a being's freely chosen direction of movement, which in turn is closely connected to deification itself:

> For it is from the beginning that [one] received being and participation in what is naturally good, and it is by conforming to this beginning through the inclination of his will [γνώμη] and by free choice [προαίρεσις], that he hastens to the end, diligently adhering to the praiseworthy course that conducts him unerringly to his point of origin. Having completed his course, such a person becomes God, receiving from God to be God, for to the beautiful nature inherent in the fact that he is *God's image*, he freely chooses to add the *likeness* to God by means of the virtues.[27]

Gnomic will is seen by Maximus as the disposition of the appetite toward the most appropriate thing to choose,[28] while choice is the actualization of γνώμη and concerns the choice of means by which an end is to be achieved;[29] as such, it is a composite of appetite, deliberation, and judgment.[30] These are in fact stages in the volitional process: "For we desire

21. Ibid., 7, 1085A.
22. Ibid., 1084D.
23. See ibid., 1080BC.
24. See ibid., 1084D.
25. See *De charitate*, III.24.
26. See ibid., III.25.
27. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1084A.
28. See *Opuscule* 1, PG 91, 17C.
29. Ibid., 13C.
30. Ibid., 16C.

before we deliberate; and after deliberating, we judge; and after judging, we freely choose that which has been shown by the judgment to be the better over that which has been shown to be the worse."[31] Moments of desire, deliberation, judgment, and choice are parts of a much larger sequence of willing, which process Maximus describes as follows:

> For after intending it inquires. And after inquiring, it examines. And after examining, it deliberates. And after deliberating, it judges or decides. And after deciding, it freely chooses. And after freely choosing, it initiates. And after initiating [an action], it employs something. And in the employing it ceases from the appetitive motion toward that thing. For no one makes use of something without first having initiated. And no one initiates without having first freely chosen it. And no one freely chooses something without having first decided. And no one decides without having first examined [the alternatives]. And no one examines without having first intended. And no one intends without having first reflected. And no one reflects without having first been moved by appetite. And no one is intelligently moved by appetite without being by nature rational. Therefore man being by nature a rational creature is appetitive, reflective, capable of intending, inquiring, examining, freely choosing, initiating, and employing [something].[32]

This means that the process of will and its stages are inherent in man's nature qua rational being. Προαίρεσις, as the culmination of the process, is a choice which concerns the means for reaching an end, but it does not concern the end itself.[33] Maximus traces a similar scheme of the process of willing in the *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, albeit with an addition that sheds some light on the position of γνώμη: "And when willing, we also inquire, examine, deliberate, judge, are inclined toward [διατίθημι], choose, impel ourselves toward, and make use of a thing."[34] To be inclined (διατίθημι as a verb) or to have a disposition (διάθεσις as a noun)[35] toward something corresponds to γνώμη, as Maximus defines γνώμη to be the "appetite of the inner disposition to what depends on us, from which the choice comes; or a disposition for things that depend on us, on which we have appetitively deliberated."[36] Therefore, γνώμη is a disposition or an inclination of the

31. Ibid., 13A.

32. Ibid., 21D–24A.

33. Maximus says that we deliberate about things that are in our power and whose ends are unknown to us. To explain that we deliberate only about things in our power (and not about those out of our reach), he gives an example of wanting to eat but having only bread and a stone at one's disposal—the deliberation is not about what to eat, as eating a stone is not possible (see ibid., 17B).

34. *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, PG 91, 293BC.

35. Larchet, *La divinisation*, 137–38, notes the importance of Maximus's usage of verbs, instead of nouns, in order to emphasize that these acts of willing are related to a subject.

36. *Opuscule* 1, 17C.

will, and choice is its actualization. While the faculty of will is inherent to the rational nature of man, it can nevertheless differ by its mode (*tropos*): "On the one hand, then, the faculty of will has been shown to be one with the rational principle of the nature of all men. But on the other hand, there is distinction [between it and] the mode of its motion."[37] The distinction between the will as belonging to nature, and the mode of the will's motion, is important from the point of view of deification, because the volitional moment is the decisive aspect of the being's direction of movement and of its capacity to participate in well-being. As the middle term, well-being seems to be crucial to the entire scheme, since it connects being with ever-being, and Maximus stresses that this connection should always be observed, because the contrary would mean abuse and deformation:

> From their exact understanding of beings, the saints learned that there exist three general modes accessible to human beings, modes by which God created all things, for he endowed us with substance and existence so that we might have being, well-being, and eternal-being. The two extremes (that is, being and eternal-being) belong solely to God, who is their author, but the intermediate mode depends on our inclination and motion, and through it the extremes are properly said to be what they are, for if the middle term were absent, their designation would be meaningless, for the good (that is, well-being) would not be present in their midst, and thus the saints realized that apart from their eternal movement toward God, there was no other way for them to possess and preserve the truth of the extremes, which is assured only when well-being is mixed in the middle of them. Having therefore intensified the visual power of the soul by means of reason in accord with nature, [they] heard, as it were, reason itself crying out that one must not use natural energies in a manner contrary to nature, since the misuse of natural powers necessarily leads to their destruction.[38]

The true being is therefore not attained just by being and ever-being, but it has to be defined by well-being, too. Well-being, as already noted, is not a given, but it is dependent upon a human being's free inclination and movement, which determine if the being is to be good and wise, or the opposite. While God, who is self-existent, has no contrary qualities, and created beings, on the other hand, can be good and wise, they can also be the opposite—vicious and ignorant. To which of the contrary qualities a being will direct itself depends on the will: "To share in His goodness and wisdom or not to share, this depends on the will and purpose of ra-

37. Ibid., 25A.
38. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1116AC.

tional beings."[39] Similarly: "That rational and intellectual substances have ever-being or are not, depends on the will and counsel of Him who creates all things well; that they be good or bad by choice depends on the will of the creatures."[40] What this means is that all beings are created good, their nature is good; however, depending on their will and choices, beings can move in the opposite direction and thus be evil. Nevertheless, evil is not to be seen as a quality of substance: "Evil is not considered in the substance of creatures, but in mistaken and irrational movements."[41] If irrationality is the main character of evil movements, then they are, by definition, contrary to rationality as the main quality of beings that are "portions of God"; and therefore evil is contrary to nature itself. Thus, evil cannot belong to nature, but it does belong to the free choice of beings, which can often be contrary to the *logos* of nature. According to the disposition of the will, the human being possesses at the same time the prospect of being in accordance with the movement of nature, in conformity with the *logos*, and therefore of coming closer to God, or straying away from the *logos* of the nature and, consequently, away from God.[42] The capacity to will is an essential property of man as a rational being, since "everything that is rational by nature, certainly also possesses a will by nature."[43] However, the chance to move and act by rational will implies the ability to choose between different alternatives, which would mean that man is supposed to exercise will in accordance with the *logos* of his nature, and without any inner struggles or divisions when it comes to choice. Joseph Farrell argues that free choice in the eschaton would mean that it is directed toward a plurality of divine goods,[44] which are all good, and thus each choice would be good, without any opposition between good and evil.[45] However, we cannot conclude from Maximus's writings that in the eschaton human beings will have προαίρεσις as a choice or a preference. In fact, he claims that saints will have a mode of willing, but not προαίρεσις. The sinful προαίρεσις always implies a deliberative choice between opposing alternatives, between good and evil, and such a choice is impossible in the eschatological state, where there is no evil.[46] Nonetheless, this does not imply the annihilation

39. *De charitate*, III.27.

40. Ibid., IV.13.

41. Ibid., IV.14.

42. See Luigi Manca, *Il primato della volontà in Agostino e Massimo il Confessore* (Rome: Armando, 2002), 160.

43. Maximus, *Opuscule 7*, in Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 77B.

44. See *Capita gnostica*, I.48.

45. See Farrell, *Free Choice*, 109–15, 150–51.

46. Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 159–60.

of freedom—authentic freedom means freedom from sin and acting in accordance with one's nature, which is fully realized and actualized in the eschaton. Saints' wills will move in different ways, and these differences will be according to their mode of movement.[47]

In his actual state, however, man must assimilate his will with his principle of nature:

> [God] has made it very clear that when the γνώμη has been united to the principle of nature, the free choice [προαίρεσις] of those who have kept it so will not be in conflict with God since nothing is considered unreasonable in the principle of nature, which is as well a natural and divine law, when the movement of the γνώμη is made in conformity with it.[48]

This presentation of the gnomic will, as directed toward goods around God and in conformity with the *logos* of nature, is in accordance with Maximus's definition of γνώμη as the act of will related to some real or assumed good.[49] While gnomic will is united to the *logos* of nature within the prelapsarian and eschatological perspectives, the situation in the postlapsarian state is quite different—one might say that the prelapsarian situation concerns the relation to real goods, while the postlapsarian revolves around assumed, but not real, goods. In this way, γνώμη introduces divisions and splits in human life after the fall, where not each choice is good and there is opposition between good and evil, which subsequently brings about inner struggles in human being.[50]

These considerations lead to the understanding of Maximus's distinctions between the *logos* of being and its mode of existence, between nature and hypostasis or person, and finally between natural will and gnomic will. Nature, according to Maximus, is identical to substance (οὐσία),[51] and it designates what is common to individual beings belonging to categories of universal, genus, and species. Hypostasis is identified with person and differentiates individuals in their particular, proper qualities: "Those who are united in one single substance are distinguished according to their hypostases or persons, and this is true for angels, human beings, and all creatures belonging to the same species or genus."[52] The relationship between hypostasis and nature is such that "it is impossible to conceive a hypostasis with-

47. See *Opuscule* 1, 24B–25A.
48. *Expositio orationis dominicae*, 901D.
49. See *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, 308C. Cf. Aristotle, *De anima*, I.3, 406A.
50. Cf. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 119–20, and 134–35.
51. See *Opuscule* 14, 149B.
52. Maximus, *Epistula* 15, 549C. See Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 53ff.

out a nature,"[53] in that, nature is hypostasis's possession, as hypostasis is always incarnate in a nature.[54] According to Maximus's definition, hypostasis is "the essence plus its individuating characteristics, distinguishing it from others of the same essence through number."[55] This means that, despite being immutable in its *logos*, nature can have more and different modes, all of which depend on hypostasis determined by will (γνώμη) and choices (προαίρεσις).[56] Accordingly, Maximus distinguishes natural will and gnomic will. Natural will belongs to nature and corresponds to the *logos* of being, while gnomic will is personal and represents the being's mode of existence.

Natural will is defined as "an appetitive power," and when nature is embraced by natural will, it desires to be, to live, and to move according to senses and intellect, since it is naturally attached to the *logos* of being, according to which it was created.[57] On the other hand, gnomic will is an impulse, marked by choice, which makes us move in one or the other direction,[58] and as such it does not belong to nature, but to hypostasis;[59] consequently, Maximus concludes that it appears as a "mode of use [τρόπος], not the *logos* of nature."[60] The distinction λόγος–τρόπος is appropriate to explain the difference between natural and gnomic will—while the *logos* of nature is identical in all human beings, and so is their natural will, the mode of use differs on the personal (hypostatic) level, and thus it is not always in accordance with the *logos*. This is also the explanation used to illustrate how human willing can be opposed to God:

> Willing [το θέλειν] as natural does not oppose God; but as moved by us in an unnatural way, it clearly opposes and, since most of the time it is rebellious, what follows is sin. It is according to the τρόπος of its movement by wrong use, and not by the *logos* of its power by nature that it is directed against the law and against the λόγος.[61]

Natural will cannot oppose God, since it is rooted in human nature or essence, and since all natural things are produced by God, they cannot be evil in their nature. However, it is the hypostasis that perverts natural things, and "it is in this way that we deliberately [γνωμικῶς] become attached to all the different forms of evil."[62] The distinction between natural

53. *Opuscule* 23, 264A.
54. Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 222–24.
55. Maximus, *Epistula* 15, 557D.
56. See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 134.
57. See *Opuscule* 1, 12CD.
58. Ibid., 14, 153AB.
59. Ibid. 16, 192BC.
60. *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, 308D.
61. *Opuscule* 20, 236C.
62. Ibid., 7, 80B.

and gnomic wills is in fact a distinction between the will and the mode of employment of the will,[63] or, as previously mentioned, the mode of its motion, which can be natural or unnatural.[64] As such "it exists only in the person using it, and distinguishes him from others."[65] Given this statement, one can concur with Tollefsen's remark that "if we are looking for a principle of individuation in Maximus, the gnomic will is certainly a strong candidate."[66] Since it is a mode of employment of the will, the gnomic will can be said to be the *tropos* of the will. Maximus explains this distinction:

> To will and to will in a particular manner are not the same, just as the power of sight and the specific exercise of perception are not the same. Will, just like sight, is of nature and exists in all things that belong to the same class and have an identical nature. But to will in a particular manner, as likewise to see in a particular manner—in other words, to will to walk, or, to will not to walk, and to look to the right hand or to the left, or up or down, or to look toward concupiscence or toward the rational principles in beings—all this is a mode of the use of the will and perception.[67]

The will and the mode of willing correspond to the concepts of *logos* and *tropos*, while gnomic will is the mode of willing specific to the fallen human hypostasis,[68] and it is not to be seen as the principle of nature.[69] The relationship between nature, hypostasis, and mode of existence can be briefly summarized as follows: 1) nature designates the "what" of a being; 2) hypostasis designates the "who" of a being; and 3) mode of existence designates the "how" of a being.[70] Maximus sums up the relationships between *logos–tropos* and nature–person in reference to gnomic will:

63. See *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, 308C.

64. See *De charitate*, IV.13.

65. *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, 293A.

66. Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 134.

67. *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, 292D.

68. Farrell, *Free Choice*, 188, ascribes gnomic will to the created human hypostasis, but it is more accurate to ascribe it to the fallen (postlapsarian) human hypostasis.

69. Maximus's concept of will has been widely studied. For more detailed discussions, see Léthel, *Théologie de l'agonie du Christ*; Farrell, *Free Choice*; Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*; Steenberg, "Gnomic Will and a Challenge to the True Humanity of Christ in Maximus the Confessor," *Studia Patristica* 42 (2006): 237–242; Bernardo De Angelis, *Natura, persona, libertà: L'antropologia di Massimo il Confessore* (Rome: Armando, 2002); Manca, *Il primato della volontà*; Ian McFarland, "Naturally and by Grace: Maximus the Confessor on the Operation of the Will," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 4 (2005): 410–33; Filip Ivanovic, "Maximus the Confessor on Freedom," *Crkvene studije: Church Studies* 7 (2010): 77–93; Ivanovic, "Il concetto della volontà."

70. See Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 223; Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 103. Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology*, 96, claims that "the supreme ontological definition of hypostasis as the mode of existence is the fact of the person," thus making hypostasis identical with the mode of existence.

It is by being some thing, not as being some one, that each of us principally operates as man; but by being some one, for example, Peter or Paul, he gives form to the mode of action—more or less intensively, determining it this way or that according to his gnomic will [κατὰ γνώμην]. Hence in the *tropos* the changeability of persons is known in their activity, in the *logos* in the inalterability of natural operations.[71]

The essence, therefore, determines a human being to act as a human being, while the hypostasis gives form to the *tropos* of action according to the γνώμη, thus explaining the inalterability of *logos* and changeability of *tropos*, that is, nature and person, respectively. This leads to the understanding that one of the chief differences between *logos* and *tropos* is that *logos* is stable, immutable, and fixed, while *tropos* is unstable, and susceptible to change and modification or innovation:

Every innovation, generally speaking, takes place in relation to the mode of whatever is being innovated, not in relation to its principle of nature, because when a principle is innovated it effectively results in the destruction of nature, since the nature in question no longer possesses inviolate the principle according to which exists. When, however, the mode is innovated—so that the principle of nature is preserved inviolate—it manifests a wondrous power, for it displays nature being acted on and acting outside the limits of its own laws. Now the principle of human nature is that it consists of soul and body, and this nature consists of a rational soul and body, whereas its mode is the order whereby it naturally acts and is acted upon, frequently alternating and changing, without however in any way changing nature along with it.[72]

The importance of nature, will, choice, *logos*, and *tropos* is emphasized quite heavily by Maximus. The idea that he constantly repeats is that the human person is responsible for adjusting its actions to the *logos* of nature proper to it. On the one hand, this means that the mode of being should be conformed to the *logos* of being, and on the other, that the mode of will should be in accordance with natural will. Thus the choice, as the actualization of γνώμη, conforms to God:

However, it is not correct to identify the mode of existence with hypostasis, since the mode is the expression of hypostasis—it is how one hypostasis is unique and different with respect to other hypostases. While in the English edition of his book it reads that the mode of existence "manifests" hypostasis, which is acceptable, in the original Greek version the verb used is εἶναι (mode of existence *is* hypostasis), and again a few pages earlier in the Greek version, Loudovikos writes about ἡ ταύτιση (identification) of *tropos*, hypostasis, and person (see Loudovikos, Ἡ εὐχαριστιακή ὀντολογία στην θεολογική σκέψη τοῦ Αγ. Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητῆ [PhD thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki: 1989], 140–42). Maximus himself says that in the *tropos* the character of persons is made known through their action (*Opuscule* 10, 137A), but he never claimed the identification of *tropos* and person.

71. *Opuscule* 10, 137A cited in Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 132.

72. *Ambiguorum liber* 42, 1341D.

When the intention [γνώμη] has been united to the principle [λόγος] of nature, the free choice [προαίρεσις] of those who have kept it so will not be in conflict with God since nothing is considered unreasonable in the principle of nature, which is as well a natural and a divine law, when the movement of free will [γνώμη] is made in conformity with it. And if there is nothing unreasonable in the principle of nature, it is likely that the intention [γνώμη] moved according to the principle of nature will have an activity habitually corresponding in all things to God.[73]

The conformity of will to the *logos* of nature is a prerequisite for deification, but this task is not easy to achieve, as the will is often dominated by passions contrary to God. It is up to the human being alone to discern between good and evil, and to safeguard nature by freely turning away from passions:

In the movement of this principle [λόγος of nature] he should know what is the law of nature and what is that of the passions, whose tyranny comes about by a choice of free will and not by nature. He should also preserve the law of nature by an activity conformed to nature and keep the law of passions far away from his intention [γνώμη]. He should safeguard by reason the nature which of itself is pure and spotless, without hatred or dissension. He should on the contrary make free will [γνώμη] a partner of nature which does not involve itself in anything beyond what the principle of nature gives out.[74]

Being in accordance with nature means simply being oneself; moving in conformity with the *logos* is the self-realization of the being, and when the being realizes itself, then it becomes close to God. What is interesting in Maximus is that he gives the ability to the creature to be or not to be itself—the creature must freely choose to be itself, and that is why free will has to be in partnership with the principle of nature. The dialectics of *logos* and *tropos* point to the dialectics of image and likeness: the *logos* of nature represents creation in the image of God, but it is through will and choice that likeness to God is attained.[75] A human being's task is to use free will in order to traverse the path from image to likeness: "The holiness of the divine image has been naturally included to persuade the soul to transform itself by its free will [κατὰ τὴν γνώμην] to the likeness of God."[76] Man's calling is inscribed in his nature, but it depends on his free choice whether this calling will be realized. On the one hand: "'God will be all things in everything' . . . , and it is with respect to this sharing that we are, and are

73. *Expositio orationis dominicae*, 901D.
74. Ibid., 905A.
75. See *Ambiguorum liber 7*, 1084A.
76. *Expositio orationis dominicae*, 889B.

called, 'Gods,' 'children of God,' the 'body,' and 'members of God,' and, it follows, 'portions of God,' and other such things, in the progressive ascent of the divine plan to its final end."[77] However, on the other hand, Adam refused to achieve this end: "Our forefather Adam misused his freedom and turned instead to what was inferior, redirecting his desire from what was permissible to what had been forbidden . . . , but being deceived he chose to estrange himself from the divine and blessed goal, preferring by his own choice to be a 'pile of dust' rather than God by grace."[78] The first man, then, used his free will to turn away from the end designated for human beings. In this way he refused deification by grace, opposed his choice to his natural will, and failed to accord the *tropos* of his existence with the *logos* of his nature. The links between *logos* and *tropos*, and natural and gnomic will, bring us to the previously mentioned triad of being, well- (or ill-) being, and eternal-being. The connection with the *logos–tropos* relationship is expressed by Maximus in his explanation of the Sabbath: "The sixth day reveals the principle [λόγος] of being of things, the seventh indicates the manner [τρόπος] of the well-being of things, the eighth communicates the ineffable mystery of the eternal well-being of things."[79] Being then corresponds to the *logos* of nature, and well-being corresponds to the mode of existence. A creature can participate in well-being only if it is in harmony with its own *logos* of being, this harmony being the result of the appropriate mode of existence.[80] The third member of the being triad, the eternal-being, does not belong to natural powers, nor does it stem from free will:

> The principle of being, which by nature possesses only the potential for actualization, cannot in any way possess this potential in its fullness without the faculty of free choice. That of well-being, on the other hand, possesses the actualization of natural potential only by inclination of the will, for it does not possess this potential in its totality separately from nature. That of eternal-being, finally, which wholly contains those that precede it (that is, the potential of the one and the activity of the other), absolutely does not exist as a natural potential within beings, nor does it at all follow from the willing of free choice. . . . But eternal-being is a limit, bringing a halt to nature in terms of its potential, and to free choice in terms of its activity, without in any way changing the principle according to which the one and the other exist.[81]

77. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1092C.

78. Ibid., 1092CD.

79. *Capita gnostica*, I.56.

80. See Vladimir Cvetković, "U prilog jednoj filozofiji stvaranja: Maksim Ispovednik," *Filozofija i društvo: Philosophy and Society* 22, no. 4 (2011): 147.

81. *Ambiguorum liber* 65, 1392B, cited in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 145.

Eternal-being, therefore, is not immanent in beings, that is, it does not depend on their nature or their free will, but it is given through grace. This corresponds with Maximus's other claim that God grants being and eternal-being to essence, while well-being is granted to "fitness of will and judgment."[82] It is tempting to view the triad of being–*logoi* in a strict relationship with nature–grace dialectics in terms of "the relation and distinction of nature and grace, of the natural and supernatural order,"[83] or in the sense of a "distinction of an order other than the natural one and irreducible to it."[84] While Maximus obviously does distinguish nature from grace, their boundaries are not as clear-cut as one might wish them to be. To think that only eternal-being is a gift of grace would be wrong, since both being and eternal-being are given to the essence; they are both given by grace, and it is only well-being, or its opposite ill-being, that depends on the creature itself, that is, on its mode of existence. The very fact of creation is a clue toward understanding the role of grace in both being and eternal-being: since the essence of created things was created out of non-being, then it has non-being as its opposite, and it "depends on Him who in the true sense is whether the substance of things should ever be or not be."[85] This means that the created essence "both ever is and will be sustained by His all-powerful might, even though, as was said, it has non-being as contrary, for it was produced from non-being into being, and whether it is or is not depends on His will."[86] Maximus supports this by claiming that God "bestows [χαρισαμένον] being, well-being, and ever-being on His creatures,"[87] namely, all three elements of the triad are in fact products of God's grace. In another place, the Confessor states that God is the giver [χαριστικὸς] of being as well as of well-being.[88] In the *Ambiguum* 10, Maximus also talks about the triad of being, well-being, and eternal-being, concluding that "the two extremes (being and eternal-being) belong solely to God, who is their author, but the intermediate mode depends on our inclination and motion."[89] This is the meaning behind the statement that being and eternal-being correspond to the image, while well-being corresponds to the likeness—both being and eternal-being are God's gifts, thus they correspond to the image, and well-being is ascribed

82. *De charitate*, III.25.
83. Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua*, 178.
84. Riou, *Le monde*, 75.
85. *De charitate*, III.28.
86. Ibid.
87. *De charitate*, III.23.
88. See *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1073C.
89. Ibid., 10, 1116B.

to the likeness, since it is something that is to be attained, that has to be strived for, and it depends on the creature's disposition of will. How it can be said, in one instance, that grace provides all three members of the triad, while in another moment the claim is made regarding only the first and third members, becomes clearer from the following passage:

> Man in the beginning was created according to the image of God, surely so that he might be born of the Spirit in the exercise of his own free choice, and to acquire in addition the likeness by the keeping of the divine commandment, so that the same man, being by nature a creation of God, might also be the son of God and God through the Spirit by grace. For there was no other way for man, being created, to become the son of God and God by the grace of divinization, without first being born of the Spirit, in the exercise of his free choice, owing to the indomitable power of self-determination which naturally dwells within him.[90]

In order for grace to take place, self-movement and free choice have to be exercised. According to self-movement, man receives likeness to God, and becomes deified by grace. In other words, if man is created by nature in the image of God, and if self-movement is inherent in human nature, then being self-moved and moved by God can be considered identical: "God is the beginning and the end," and so "from God come both our general power of motion (for he is our beginning), and the particular way that we move toward him (for he is our end)."[91] This is why moving toward God means moving toward true being or eternal-well-being, while moving in the opposite direction means falling into non-being or ill-being. Nature, choice, and grace thus become wholly interpenetrated, as it is on all three of them that a creature's creation and destiny depend: nature is God's gift, and there is a power of nature in it, which can be used according to nature or against nature, thus achieving well-being or ill-being, and it is depending on this that God will provide eternal-well-being to the former, or he will assign eternal-ill-being to the latter:

> Throughout the whole being of those who by their free choice have used the principle of being according to nature, the whole God suitably abides, bestowing on them eternal well-being by giving them a share in himself, because he alone, properly speaking is, and is good, and is eternal; but to those who have willfully used the principle of their being contrary to nature, he rightly renders not well-being but eternal ill-being, since well-being is no longer accessible to those who have placed themselves in opposition to it.[92]

90. Ibid., 42, 1345D.
91. Ibid., 7, 1073C.
92. Ibid., 65, 1392D.

Here again, it becomes clear how a being is, is-well, and is eternally, by participation and grace in God who alone properly is, is-well, and is eternally; in being and eternal-being a creature participates by nature as granted by grace, while participation in well-being is dependent on gnomic will and movement in conformity with, or in opposition, to nature.

We can then assemble the mentioned dyads in the following way: *logos*/ being/ image compared to *tropos*/ well-being/ likeness. If we add the concepts of will, then we have *logos*/ being/ image/ natural will compared to *tropos*/ well-being/ likeness/ gnome.[93] The missing member of the triad of being, eternal-being, does not belong to natural powers or to the mode of existence of a being, but it is given only by grace. However, it does belong to the image of God in man, and as the previous discussion has shown, these groups of concepts and their comparisons are not to be taken in the strictest sense of nature–grace duality: in Maximus there is no clear-cut boundary between nature and grace—grace extends to both being and eternal-being, to both creation and deification.[94] What will be the character of eternal-being depends on the creature's mode of existence—those who have attained well-being will be introduced to eternal well-being, and those who have fallen into ill-being will be introduced to eternal ill-being. Therefore, being and eternal-being are firmly inscribed in the essence, because they are the image of God, but attaining well-being is a matter of likeness, in that it means adding "to the natural beauty of the image the voluntary good of likeness."[95] This is a condition of deification which brings about the identity of God and man: "By holy communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries, we are given fellowship and identity with him by participation in likeness, by which man is deemed worthy from man to become God."[96] Attaining likeness signifies participating in God, becoming fully God or, to be more precise, becoming by participation and grace what God is by nature—it means deification. By now the importance of the concepts introduced herein should be evident from the point of view of our topic, so let us reiterate what has been said so far:

93. Loudovikos has identified eleven triads corresponding to the triad of being, see *A Eucharistic Ontology*, 76–80.

94. See, for example, *De charitate*, III.23–27; *Ambiguorum liber* 35, 1289A; *Mystagogia*, 5, etc. See also Perl, *Methexis*, 251ff, for his thorough critique of the overly emphasized tendency to read the Western nature–grace duality into Maximus's doctrine, present in scholars such as Sherwood, Garrigues, and Riou.

95. *Capita gnostica*, I.13.

96. *Mystagogia*, 24 (CCSG 69:58).

1) God created human beings in his image and granted to their nature being and eternal-being.
2) Human beings possess free will and choice, which are reflected on the level of the person, through the mode of existence, by which they can move in accordance with or in opposition to their nature.
3) Depending on the direction of their movement, they acquire well-being or ill-being, which translates to attaining or not attaining likeness to God.
4) Eternal-being, complemented by well-being or ill-being, brings about eternal-well-being or eternal-ill-being.
5) Those who direct their will in accordance with nature, and harmonize their *tropos* with *logos*, acquire well-being and likeness to God, who graciously deifies them.

Looking at points (1) and (5) we see that creation and deification are complementary, in that they both are granted by God's grace alone; what happens in between depends on the creature's voluntary choice—God operates both creation and deification, just as he is both beginning and end,[97] so deification appears to be "the inseparable union of the proper beginning with the proper end,"[98] connected by the free voluntary movement of the creature.[99] This free voluntary movement or choice, as Perl rightly argues, serves "to distinguish nature and grace by giving the creature a positive role in its own creation and deification, but does not allow it to exist prior to its reception of grace."[100]

Incarnation and Deification

The triad of being, well-being, and eternal-being, as previously mentioned, is comparable to a number of triads appearing in Maximus's writings. One such triad is the one formed around the concepts of natural law, scriptural law, and the law of grace, which the Confessor considers to be universal laws. These have a close relationship to the concept of will, because "each of these laws has a peculiar mode of life and appropriate course of action, since each generates a different disposition of the will [γνώμη] for those who follow it."[101] The relationship to the triad of being is explained as follows:

97. See *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1073C.
98. *Ad Thalassium*, 59 (CCSG 22:53).
99. See *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1073C.
100. Perl, *Methexis*, 263.
101. *Ad Thalassium*, 64 (CCSG 22:233).

For the law of nature consists in natural reason assuming control of the senses, while the scriptural law, or the fulfillment of the scriptural law, consists in the natural reason acquiring a spiritual desire conducive to a relation of mutuality with others of the same human nature. . . . The one indicates only the connatural sharing in being [τὸ εἶναι], while the other signifies the providence leading as toward well-being [τὸ εὖ εἶναι]. . . . The law of grace consists in a supernatural reason, and transforms nature, without violating it, unto deification. It also displays, beyond comprehension, the supernatural and superessential Archetype in human nature, as in an image, and exhibits the permanence of eternal well-being [τὸ ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι].[102]

The three laws, therefore, influence human will in terms of certain modes of life, which ban irrationality and division among those of the same nature, inspire spiritual desire for mutual solidarity, and deify nature while preserving it. However, these three laws are not just three modes of life or three stages of spiritual development, but they are also to be understood in close relation with the threefold incarnation of Logos, which Maximus sees as incarnation in the *logoi* of things, incarnation in Scripture, and incarnation in flesh, which is the historical Incarnation of Christ:

When the God-bearing teacher says that the "Logos becomes thick," I think he does so with the following ideas in mind. Either because the Logos, who is simple and incorporeal, and who spiritually nourishes all the divine powers in heaven according to rank, deemed it worthy to "become thick" through his manifestation in the flesh . . . , so that he might instruct us, by means of words and examples suited to us, in mysteries that transcend the power of all human speech. . . . Or one could say that the Logos "becomes thick" in the sense that for our sake he ineffably concealed himself in the *logoi* of beings, and is obliquely signified in proportion to each visible thing, as if through certain letters, being whole in whole things while simultaneously remaining utterly complete and fully present, whole, and without diminishment in each particular thing. . . . Or one could say that the Logos "becomes thick" in the sense that, for the sake of our thick minds, he consented to be both embodied and expressed through letters, syllables, and sounds, so that from all these he might gradually gather those who follow him to himself, being united by the Spirit, and thus raise us up to the simple and unconditioned idea of him, bringing us for his own sake into union with himself by contraction to the same extent that he has for our sake expanded himself according to the principle of condescension.[103]

This interpretation of the embodiment of the Word testifies to Maximus's idea that God "wills always and in all things to accomplish the mys-

102. Ibid. (CCSG 22:235–37).
103. *Ambiguorum liber* 33, 1285C–1288A.

tery of his embodiment."[104] Thus, the threefold incarnation is to be understood as a gradual revelation of God, who is present in the nature of beings, in the words and the letters of the Scriptures, and in flesh as the incarnated Christ. In the first sense, he is present as Creator, in the second he acts as a pedagogue, while in the third he appears as a Savior. The being is thus created and incited to ascend through the understanding of "syllables and sounds," in order to be saved finally by receiving knowledge above words. The soteriological accent of the exposition is clearly shown through Maximus's insistence on using the expression "for our sakes," which emphasizes the salvation of human beings in relation to the Incarnation. In this way the Logos "holds together not only the *logoi* of creation but also the three aspects of creation, revelation (illumination), and salvation."[105] The Incarnation, in fact, reveals the divine plan:

> Just as our human word which proceeds naturally from the mind is messenger of the secret movements of the mind, so does the Word of God, who knows the Father by essence as Word knows the Mind which has begotten it (since no created being can approach the Father without him), reveal the Father whom he knows. As the Word of God by nature he is spoken of as the "messenger of the great counsel." The great plan of God is the secret and unknown mystery of the dispensation which the only-begotten Son revealed by fulfilling in the incarnation, thus becoming a messenger of the great plan of God the eternal Father.[106]

It is the revelation of God's plan that is performed by the Logos through his threefold Incarnation. In this way, Christ is the messenger and revealer of God's plan on all three levels of creation, Scripture, and salvation. Since Christ is the one who is incarnated in all three types of incarnation, so is he also the center of all three laws: "Jesus Christ the Logos of God, insofar as he is Creator of all things, is also Author of the law of nature; and insofar as he is Provident and Lawgiver, he is clearly also the Giver of the law in letter and in spirit (that is, in grace)."[107] In Christ "the natural law, the written law, and the law of grace converge,"[108] and so the three laws—or the three incarnations—cannot be strictly separated or sundered, but are to be seen as "a Christological and soteriological synthesis, at which level each law is properly irreducible and plays its own necessary role cooperatively toward the goal of human deification."[109]

104. Ibid., 7, 1084D.
105. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 77.
106. *Capita gnostica*, II.22–23.
107. *Ad Thalassium*, 19 (CCSG 7:119).
108. Ibid.
109. Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 119.

The Incarnation, in fact, is a correlative of deification—without incarnation, there is no deification. Furthermore, in the Incarnation, Christ brings about deification and restores and purifies nature:

> [The Incarnation happened] in order to save the image and immortalize the flesh and, having utterly banished the principle of the serpent which had been introduced into nature, to present nature pure again as from a new beginning, with an additional advantage through deification over the first creation, and, as if by a new beginning giving substance to something not previously existing, to restore to health that which had thus collapsed, having strengthened it so as to be immune to falling through its immutability, and to fulfil all the will of God the Father with regard to it, having deified it by the power of the Incarnation.[110]

In Maximus's exposition of the incarnation–deification correspondence another aspect significant for deification comes to light—the expression τοσοῦτον–ὅσον (or *tantum–quantum*) which underlines the reciprocity of the Logos's condescension and man's ascension, that is, incarnation and deification: as much as God condescends, that much man ascends (and vice versa), or as much as God becomes human, that much man becomes God (and again, vice versa). This idea of reciprocity between incarnation and deification is something Maximus feels strongly about and something he emphasizes on several occasions:

> God by his condescension is and is called man for the sake of man, and also so that the power of this reciprocal disposition might be shown forth herein, a power that divinizes man through his love for God [διὰ τὸ φιλόθεον], and humanizes God through his love for man [διὰ τὸ φιλάνθρωπον]. And by this beautiful exchange [καλὴ ἀντιστροφὴ], it renders God man by reason of the divinization of man, and man God by reason of the Incarnation of God. For the Logos of God wills always and in all things to accomplish the mystery of his embodiment.[111]

By this "beautiful inversion" man and God exchange properties, in that God becomes man and man becomes God. This reciprocal inversion is accentuated even by the linguistic construction in which Maximus uses words φιλόθεος and φιλάνθρωπος, instead of, for example, ἀγάπη. Here, the incarnation is not, as Larchet points out, the historical incarnation of the Logos, but it is rather the mystical incarnation which finds its basis in the former and is realized in the person worthy of it.[112] In another passage Maximus says that "the more he himself [God] became a man by nature

110. *Ad Thalassium*, 54 (CCSG 7:459), cited in Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 289.
111. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1084CD.
112. See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 378.

in his Incarnation, the more he deified us by grace."[113] The inversion and reciprocity between God and man is so significant for the Confessor that he will actually claim that God and man are paradigms of one another:

> For they say that God and man are paradigms of each other [παραδείγματα ἀλλήλων], so that as much as man, enabled by love [δι' ἀγάπης], has divinized himself for God, to the same extent God is humanized for man by his love for mankind [διὰ φιλανθρωπίαν]; and as much as man has manifested God who is invisible by nature through virtues, to that same extent man is rapt by God in mind to the unknowable.[114]

But how is this reciprocity possible, and how can it be that God and man, ontologically different, exchange properties in a beautiful inversion? It is a paradoxical state in which opposed things are united and identified: "We are amazed at how finitude and infinity—things mutually exclusive, which cannot be combined—can be identified in him and can mutually reveal each other. The unlimited is circumscribed by limits in an ineffable way, while the limited unfolds, beyond its own nature, to meet the measure of infinity."[115] This circumscription of the infinite and the unfolding of the finite is the consequence of the complementarity of incarnation and deification, expressed through Maximus's formula τοσοῦτον–ὅσον, which completes in the total interpenetration of divine and human, that is, God, "in a manner befitting his goodness wholly interpenetrates [περιχωρήσαντος] all who are worthy."[116] The concept of interpenetration is the central tool with which Maximus can explain the reciprocity and mutual exchange of properties between God and man, which happens without the destruction of their respective natures. This concept has shown to be of interest for various scholars, who have treated it in different ways and even translated it using different terms. In his classic *God in Patristic Thought*, for instance, Prestige translates it as "co-inherence" and explains it as "rotation from a fixed point back to that point again."[117] The same scholar concludes that *perichoresis* is a one-sided process, in the sense that the divine penetrates the human, and he deems it to be a word play of sorts.[118] On the other hand, Wolfson, in his famous *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, gives a different explanation, which is worth quoting:

113. *Ad Thalassium*, 64 (CCSG 22:237).
114. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1113BC.
115. Maximus, *Epistula* 21, 604BC, cited in Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 260.
116. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1076C.
117. George L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1952), 293–94.
118. Ibid.

The term *perichoresis*, with either εἰς or ἐν or διὰ or πρός, is used by the fathers in the sense of a "thorough penetration," as a physical analogy for the purpose of explaining the *communicatio idiomatum*. . . . The physical analogy meant by the term *perichoresis* is the same as that of the Stoic "mixture." The *perichoresis* or penetration is always used as mutual act, but the two sides of the mutual act are conceived as being neither simultaneous in occurrence nor the same in meaning. The penetration of the divine nature into the human is taken to mean the deification of the human nature, without completely destroying it; the penetration of the human nature into the divine is taken to mean assumption by the divine nature of a human nature, without suffering any change in its divinity. While both penetrations constitute what is called the hypostatic union, it is the second penetration that constitutes what is called the Incarnation.[119]

Wolfson's understanding of the term, it seems to me, is precisely what Maximus wishes to convey by using it. Thunberg equally concurs by concluding that *perichoresis* does not mean the predominance of the divine over the human; rather, it is an expression of "a union without confusion in its consequences of full reciprocity," which means that "human *perichoresis* is in Maximus's opinion real and not illusory."[120] Although Prestige's view has been widely rejected among scholars of Maximus,[121] it still gains certain support, albeit without any new argumentation.[122]

The basis for such an explanation the Confessor finds in the Chalcedonian Christology of the unconfused union of two natures in Christ. In Maximus's words, "the human nature, united without confusion to the divine nature, is completely penetrated [περικεχώρηκε] by it, with absolutely no part of it remaining separate from the divinity to which it was united, having been assumed according to the hypostasis."[123] Moreover, penetration works in the same way as iron and fire:

Confirming the truth of His Incarnation, He has become everything for us and has done everything for us out of His own free will, without distorting His essence,

119. Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 428.

120. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 28; Thunberg develops a detailed analysis on pages 23–32. See also Verna Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1991): 53–65.

121. In addition to Wolfson and Thunberg, see also Larchet, *La divinisation*, 335–36. Törönen talks about different contexts of the perichoresis in terms of vertical interpenetration (human nature penetrated by the divine), and horizontal interpenetration, which he sees as interpenetration between natures with their activities (*Union and Distinction*, 121–24).

122. See, for example, Ioanna Sahinidou, *What Hope for the Suffering Ecosystems of Our Planet? The Contextualization of Christological Perichoresis for the Contemporary Ecological Crisis* (PhD thesis, University of Wales, 2011).

123. *Ambiguorum liber* 5, 1053B.

or its perfect and natural properties, even though he divinized them, like the iron made red-hot, having rendered our essence wholly theurgic, having penetrated [περιχωρήσας] it in an utmost manner by virtue of the union, having become one with our essence without confusion, according to the same and sole hypostasis.[124]

In this metaphor, human nature remains the same, but it receives characteristics of divinity, which happens in the interpenetration, just as iron remains iron and fire remains fire, yet the interpenetration operates the exchange of their properties, so that burning becomes the property of iron, and cutting becomes the property of fire. The union of natures in Christ is to be understood in the same way, as well as the reciprocal deification of man and humanization of God, where "the creature becomes what God is but retains its difference from him in essence."[125] In Maximus's own words:

Had man united created nature with the uncreated through love . . . , he would have shown them to be one and the same by the state of grace, the whole [creation] wholly pervading [περιχωρήσας] the whole God, and becoming everything that God is, without, however, identity in essence, and receiving the whole of God instead of [itself], and obtaining as a kind of prize for [its] ascent to God, the absolutely unique God, who is the goal of the motion of things that are moved.[126]

As a matter of fact, for a union and an exchange of properties to be possible at all, those that are united have to be different. Otherness is the key condition of union and mutual exchange in which both parts retain their own natures. This once again affirms that in a perichoretic union there can be no annihilation or destruction of either of the natures: on the contrary, it is a union in difference: "Holy Fathers have said this regarding the mutual communication [ἀντίδοσις]. It is clear that the communication requires not just one sole reality, but two realities which are unequal; by exchange, the properties belonging to one of Christ's parts, in virtue of the ineffable union, are given to the other part, without either of the parts changing or mixing with the other by the *logos* of nature."[127] By the union of two natures in Christ, human nature is not destroyed but it is renewed, that is, restored to its primordial state. Maximus discusses it at length:

In assuming both of these [creaturely origin and divine inbreathing], for our sake, God renewed our nature, or to put it more accurately, he made our nature new, returning it to its primordial beauty of incorruptibility through his holy flesh, tak-

124. *Opuscule* 4, 60B.
125. Perl, *Methexis*, 197.
126. *Ambiguorum liber* 41, 1308B.
127. *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, 296D–297A.

en from us, and animated by a rational soul, and on which he lavishly bestowed the gift of divinization, from which it is absolutely impossible to fall, being united to God made flesh, like the soul united to the body, wholly interpenetrating [περιχωρήσασαν] it in an unconfused [ἀσυγχύτως] union, and by virtue of his manifestation in the flesh, he accepted to be hidden exactly to the same degree that he himself, for the sake of the flesh, was manifested and to all appearances seemed to go outside of his own natural hiddenness. And what greater paradox could there be than that, whereas he is God by nature and deemed it fitting to become man by nature, he did not alter the natural definitions of either one of the natures by the other, but being wholly God he became and remained wholly man? For being God did not hinder him from becoming man, nor did becoming man diminish his being God, and thus he remained wholly one and the same in both, truly existing naturally in both.[128]

This passage shows how Christological doctrine, the concept of *perichoresis*, and the *tantum–quantum* formula work together in Maximus's elaboration of deification. If incarnation and deification are complementary, then it is no surprise that the Confessor finds the basis of deification precisely in Christology, that is, in the unconfused union of two natures in Christ.[129] Just as human and divine natures in Christ remain unconfused (ἀσυγχύτως), so human nature retains its properties in the deified state; and just as the two natures in Christ are found in a perichoretic embrace, so too is deification worked out through a perichoretic embrace of humanity and divinity. Here the dyophysite Christology of Maximus reaches its full importance from the viewpoint of deified humanity—it shows that deification does not mean overpowering of the divine and diminishing of the human, and it does not imply the annihilation of human nature; quite the contrary, it represents full affirmation of human nature which remains intact, deified but unconfused, renewed but not altered or destroyed. Maximus uses every opportunity to stress the integrity of nature, since "every innovation takes place in relation to the mode [τρόπος] of whatever is being innovated, not in relation to its principle of nature [λόγος],"[130] because this guarantees that the nature will remain uncorrupted, but, through its mode, it will show miraculous power

128. *Ambiguorum liber* 42, 1320AB.

129. This means that the interpenetration of natures in Christ happens in hypostasis, but it does not mean that the union is merely hypostatic, personal, and not natural. On the contrary, while the union of natures is indeed in hypostasis and their distinction is in essence, such union is, however, an ontological, natural union. See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 345; and on opposing views see Garrigues, *La charité*, 136–37; Christoph Schönborn, *God's Human Face: The Christ-Icon,* trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 120.

130. *Ambiguorum liber* 42, 1341D.

and appear to act "outside the limits of its own laws."[131] Therefore, the Confessor's emphasis is on renewed human nature, which it becomes through deification, by the innovation of its *tropos*; but, at the same time, it does not suffer any change in its *logos*. In Christological ambit, this innovated *tropos* is a mystery which, according to Maximus, is best described by the Areopagite's term "theandric": "Perhaps he who conceived of the appropriate designation for this mystery called it 'theandric' so that he might show forth the mode of exchange of the natural properties inherent in the ineffable union—which makes whatever naturally belongs to each part of Christ interchangeable with the other—without changing or confusing either part with the other on the level of their natural principles."[132]

The Confessor points out the correct understanding of Dionysius's affirmation of a new theandric energy by explaining that it should not be taken as meaning "single," but as describing the perfect incarnation.[133] Maximus proceeds by employing the famous, previously mentioned, metaphor of a burning sword as the expression of the union of fire and iron, in which both elements exchange their properties but remain the same in their natures.[134] This is a parallel to the Incarnation:

> Divinity and humanity were united in the hypostasis of the Word: neither of the natural energies was displaced in the union, neither functioned independently after the union, and neither was divided from that to which it had been conjoined and with which it coexisted. For in the indissoluble union, the Word made flesh possessed the whole active power of his own divinity together with the whole passive power of his own humanity. Being God he worked wonders in a human way, for they were accomplished through naturally passible flesh. Being man he experienced the sufferings of human nature, but in a divine way, for they unfolded at the command of his sovereign will. Or rather, both were done in a theandric way, since he is God and man at the same time.[135]

This is the full description of how Maximus understands both incarnation and deification. To be humanly God and divinely man is something brought about by incarnation, but this same state is the end achieved by deification. The life of Christ exemplifies both the present and the future of humanity, since the incarnated God demonstrates perfectly the union of human and divine natures, through his theandric actions, thus show-

131. Ibid.
132. Ibid., 5, 1057D–1060A.
133. See ibid., 1057A.
134. See ibid., 1060A. See also *Opuscule* 16, 189C–192A.
135. *Ambiguorum liber* 5, 1060AB.

ing that he accepts our present state, in order to deify it and make manifest "what we are to become." The entire passage is yet another instance of Maximus's employment of his *logos–tropos* dialectics, and thus it represents an affirmation of the constancy of nature, found in both incarnation and deification. As a matter of fact, Christ "shows the newness of the modes preserved in the permanence of their natural principles."[136] If no being is what it is without the natural *logos*, then a being would lose its authenticity if the *logos* suffers any change—if deification would presuppose a change of *logos*, then the deified man would be man no more. Nevertheless, this is precisely what Maximus warns against—there can be no change in nature, and the whole man qua man will be deified, just as God was fully man and fully God in his incarnation. What suffers change and innovation is the mode of existence, since the dialectics between *logos* and *tropos* shows how "one is a matter of nature, the other a matter of the economy."[137] If, as has been noted, *tropos* corresponds to the hypostasis, while *logos* is inalterable, then it follows that the interpenetration and the communion of natures in Christ happens according to the hypostasis, that is, it "rests on the (ontological) identity of the hypostasis and thus can come about only through and in it as its medium."[138] Affirming the integrity of natures through the hypostasis is once again strengthened by Maximus when he explains how Christ united the two natures, "in no way acting through one of the natures in separation from the other, but in all that he did he confirmed the presence of the one through the other."[139]

The incarnation of Logos and the union of natures is the basis for the deification of all humankind, as is the deification of human nature in Christ. Although he refuses to acknowledge it fully, Balthasar does say that "there is undeniably a certain orientation here toward an abstract way of conceiving both essence and nature."[140] This "abstract way of conceiving" nature means, in fact, that common human nature is deified in Christ. The Confessor points to this when he says that "the composite person of Christ is not properly called individual" and that he is not "an individual reducible to a species or a genus which could be circumscribed according to essence."[141] On the contrary, Christ assumes generic human nature,

136. Ibid., 1052A. See also 1053B.
137. Ibid., 1052B.
138. Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 258. See *Ambiguorum liber* 41, 1308B.
139. *Ambiguorum liber* 5, 1056A.
140. Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 230.
141. *Opuscule* 16, 201D–204A.

which results in him being a composite hypostasis, or ἐνυπόστατον, which he defines as that "which is put together with another, different by essence, to bring about a whole."[142] It is human nature in its totality that is found in Christ:

"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph 4:11–16).... [From this, one] has clearly learned that we are the "members" and the "body of Christ," and that we constitute "the fullness of Christ God," who "fills all things in every way" according to the plan "hidden in God the Father before the ages," with the result that we are being "recapitulated to Him" through his Son and our Lord and God Jesus Christ. For "the mystery hidden from the ages" and from all generations has now been revealed through the true and perfect Incarnation of God the Son, who united our nature to himself according to hypostasis, without division and without confusion. In and through his flesh—which he took from us, and which is endowed with intellect and reason—he has conjoined us to himself, as a kind of "first fruits" [ἀπαρχή], making us worthy to be one and the same with him, according to his humanity, since we were "predestined" before the ages to be in him as the members of his body. Just as the soul unifies the body, he joined us to himself and knit us together in the Spirit, and he leads us "to the stature of the spiritual maturity according to his own fullness."[143]

The passage confirms that all humanity, comprising all human beings, is assumed in Christ, and it is not incidentally that Maximus uses plurals in constructions such as "our nature," "conjoined us," "making us worthy," or "we were predestined ... to be in him as the members of his body." It is thus safe to concur with Doucet, who emphasizes the notion of ἀπαρχή and states that "the deification of humanity in his person resounds on all of humanity, that is, on all the persons in which common deified nature is found."[144] In the same vein, Larchet writes that "it is no longer the question of the deification of human nature of the Word in the hypostatic union with the divine nature, but of the deification of all humanity in the human nature of the Word."[145] This was actually the original divine plan for which human beings were created; however, due to Adam's misuse of his natural

142. Maximus, *Epistula* 15, 557D–560A.

143. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1097AB.

144. Marcel Doucet, *Dispute de Maxime le Confesseur avec Pyrrhus: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (Montreal: Université de Montréal, 1972), 209.

145. Larchet, *La divinisation*, 374.

power, this plan "was realized through the introduction of another, newer mode [τρόπος]."[146] This new mode was realized by Christ, and it is through him that the entirety of humanity will be deified:

> If, then, Christ as man is the first fruits [ἀπαρχή] of our nature in relation to God the Father, and a kind of yeast that leavens the whole mass of humanity, so that in the idea [ἐπίνοια] of his humanity he is with God the Father, for he is the Word, who never at any time has ceased from or gone outside of his remaining in the Father, let us not doubt that, consistent with his prayer to the Father, we shall one day be where he is now, the first fruits [ἀπαρχή] of our race. For inasmuch as he came to be below for our sakes and without change became man, exactly like us but without sin, loosing the laws of nature in a manner beyond nature, it follows that we too, thanks to him, will come to be in the world above, and become gods according to him through the mystery of grace, undergoing no change whatsoever in our nature.[147]

Christ incarnate is therefore the summation of all humanity, both historically and eschatologically. This historical incarnation reveals the first fruits of entire humanity in Christ's person, which makes human beings partakers of divinity through the first fruits of Christ's body, since God created human beings similar to him, "for through participation we are imbued with the exact characteristics of his goodness."[148] The body of Christ is the deified world, and human beings are members of his body, as they were "predestined before the ages to be in him as the members of his body."[149]

The idea of being gods as first fruits and members of Christ's body is developed further by Maximus in an eschatological motif:

> And thus … the world above will again be filled, with the members of the body being gathered together with their head, each according to its worth.… Each member … will receive the place that is appropriate to it, filling the body of him who fills all in all, which fills and is filled from all things. Thus, … by the gathering of the members of the body in union with their head and the first fruits of the rising mass of humanity, the world above will surely be filled.… In fact, it has already been filled in Christ, and will be filled again in those who become like Christ, when they, who have already shared in the likeness of his death through their sufferings, shall come to be natural outgrowths of his resurrection.[150]

146. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1097C.
147. Ibid., 31, 1280CD.
148. Ibid., 7, 1097C.
149. Ibid., 1097B.
150. Ibid., 31, 1280D–1281B.

If human beings are members of the body of Christ, then this filling of the world above is to be understood as deification in terms of unification of all the body of members and their gathering to the head of the body, which is God, who, as the head, attracts and draws men, body parts, to himself, so that "the world above will certainly be filled." However, the world is already filled in Christ; the deified world already represents the body of Christ, because his body "fills all and is filled out of all." One might see here another allusion to the interpenetration of God and man in the mystical body of Christ. In addition, this testifies to the totality and communion of human nature in Christ, because "fills all and is filled out of all" means precisely that—all, without exception, in totality—the entirety of humanity, comprised of all its individual members, is filled by Christ's body and fills it. The deified state of humanity is therefore not an estranged element or an addition to the body of Christ, but it is identical to it. Thus, Christ's body becomes the ground of humanity in both the present and the future, and as Perl has argued, "any failure to be that same body is the fall toward non-being."[151] To be that body and not to fall into non-being is again something accomplished by preserving the *logoi*:

> [At that point][152] the whole of rational creation, both of angels and human beings, will be filled with spiritual pleasure and joy. I mean those creatures that did not, out of negligence, violate any of the divine *logoi*, who by their natural motion were inclined to the end established by the Creator, but kept themselves wholly chaste and faithful to their end, knowing that they are and will become instruments of the divine nature. His fullness entirely permeates them, as a soul permeates the body, since they are to serve as his own members, well suited and useful to the Master, who shall use them as he thinks best, filling them with his own glory and blessedness, graciously giving them eternal, inexpressible life, completely free from the constituent properties of this present life, which is marred by death.[153]

The image of deified creatures as members of God's body returns in the above passage, albeit in a metaphorical sense. However, the motif of God's body and its members being filled with his fullness and glory is similar to the one used in an eschatological passage from *Ambiguum* 31. In addition, Maximus offers here a description of the deified state—those deified will be permeated by God, they will participate in his glory and blessedness,

151. Perl, *Methexis*, 297.

152. Maximus comments here on a passage from Gregory Nazianzen's *Oration* 16.9: "They will be welcomed by the ineffable light and will contemplate the holy and majestic Trinity that shines clearly and brightly and unites itself wholly to the entire soul. This alone I take to be the kingdom of heaven."

153. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1088BC.

and they will attain endless life and be free of corruption. Clearly enough, such a state cannot be reached in the present human condition, which depends on air and blood, but it is attained as a gift from God and it means to be infused with his fullness—it seems that here again Maximus underlines the dialectics between nature and grace, and the natural and deified states.

All of these considerations highlight that Maximus sees incarnation and deification as complimentary—the concepts of *perichoresis*, the exchange of properties, and the *tantum–quantum* formula, imply that there can be no deification without incarnation, and that deification is worked out in the light and on the basis of the Christological doctrine of the hypostatic union of natures. Both God's hominization and man's deification were part of the divine plan:

> He who, by the sheer inclination of his will, established the beginning of all creation, seen and unseen, before all the ages and before that beginning of created beings, had an ineffably good plan for those creatures. The plan was for him to mingle, without change on his part, with human nature by true hypostatic union, to unite human nature to himself while remaining immutable, so that he might become a man, as he alone knew how, and so that he might deify humanity in union with himself. Also, according to this plan, it is clear that God wisely divided "the ages" between those intended for God to become human, and those intended for humanity to become divine.… Since, therefore, the ages predetermined in God's purpose for the realization of his becoming human have reached their end for us, and God has undertaken and in fact achieved his own perfect incarnation, the other "ages"—those which are to come about for the realization of the mystical and ineffable deification of humanity—must follow henceforth. In these new ages God *will show the immeasurable riches of his goodness to us*, having completely realized this deification in those who are worthy. For if he has brought to completion his mystical work of becoming human, having become like us in every way save without sin, and even descended into the lower regions of the earth where the tyranny of sin compelled humanity, then God will also completely fulfill the goal of his mystical work of deifying humanity in every respect, of course, short of an identity of essence with God; and he will assimilate humanity to himself and elevate us to a position above all the heavens.[154]

The reciprocity of God becoming man and man becoming God in the sense of the former being the necessary prerequisite of the latter, together with the strong emphasis on the Christological doctrine as the bedrock of deification leads us to conclude with Thunberg that the characteristic of deification is "that it is effected precisely under the conditions which are

154. *Ad Thalassium*, 22, 137–39.

those of the hypostatic union in Christ," and that "deification is as it were simply the other side of Incarnation."[155] In the same manner, Radosavljević summarizes the incarnation–deification motif:

> We can now say with certainty that according to Maximus "the mystery entrusted to the first man at the beginning of the ages," of which the mystery of Christ constitutes "the manifestation and the consummation," would only have been completed by the Incarnation of God the Word, for the simple reason that deification is inaccessible to the created nature itself, and that complete and true deification signifies hypostatic union of human nature to God. This union has been fully operated and accomplished only by the Incarnation of God, which constitutes its beginning, continuation, and completion. This is the precise reason why the Triune God and Friend of Men conceived in his Council, before the ages, the deification of man and creation in Christ, that is, the union according to the hypostasis of human nature to God the Word.[156]

Deification, therefore, means the hypostatic union of human nature with God, but this union is fully accomplished only with the Incarnation, which becomes a basis and a realization of the divine plan, essentially unrelated to the Fall, as Maximus himself emphasizes that Christ was foreknown not as what he was by nature, but by what he manifested when he became human.[157] To put it in the context of Maximus's *logos–tropos* dyad, this means that the Fall did not modify the *logos* of Incarnation, but its *tropos*.[158]

Epistemology, Moral Philosophy, and Ecclesiology

The close connection between the triads of εἶναι/ εὖ εἶναι/ ἀεὶ εἶναι and those of the three incarnations and the three laws evokes another comparable triad, which refers to spiritual development and consists of practical philosophy (πρακτική φιλοσοφία), natural contemplation (φυσική θεωρία), and mystical theology (μυστική θεολογία).[159] The interrelatedness between these three is described by Maximus as follows:

155. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 430–32.

156. Artemije Radosavljević, "Le problème du 'présupposé' ou du 'non-présupposé' de l'Incarnation de Dieu le Verbe," in Heinzer and Schoenborn, *Maximus Confessor*, 203–204.

157. See *Ad Thalassium*, 60 (CCSG 22:79).

158. See Bogdan Bucur, "Foreordained from All Eternity: The Mystery of the Incarnation according to Some Early Christian and Byzantine Writers," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 62 (2008): 205. In the article Bucur traces the idea that Incarnation is unrelated to the Fall in several authors, including the Confessor, the Areopagite, Cabasilas, and others.

159. On the terminology of the three stages and the parallels with Evagrius, see Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 333ff.

The mind that follows well the active [πρακτική] life advances in prudence; the contemplative [θεωρητική] life, in knowledge [γνῶσις]. To the one it belongs to bring the contender to a discernment of virtue and vice; to the other, to lead the participant to the *logoi* of incorporeal and corporeal creation. Then finally is it fit for the grace of theology [θεολογική] when it has passed beyond, on the wings of charity, all the things just mentioned; and, being in God, it will examine, through the Spirit, the essential concerning Him, as much as the human mind may.[160]

The practical stage of spiritual development concerns the purification of the human person, through the eradication of passions, ascetic practice, the observance of commandments, and leading a virtuous life. The theoretical stage implies attaining knowledge of the *logoi* of corporeal and incorporeal, visible and invisible beings.[161] When the two stages are realized, that is, when the virtues are attained and knowledge of things is reached, then the being "both does and considers everything according to right reason and is misled in no way."[162] This leads to the third stage, mystical theology, which means being placed in God and knowing his attributes—the stage of theology is, in fact, Maximus's employment of Dionysian apophatic and cataphatic methods, by which it is impossible to know God's nature but only his attributes. Thus, the Confessor exclaims that "for among men he truly is a great theologian who searches out these reasons [attributes], be it ever so little,"[163] because "the very fact of knowing nothing is knowledge surpassing the mind."[164]

While there is certain continuity between the first two stages, as perhaps a passage from *Chapters on Knowledge* would suggest,[165] they should not, however, be seen as sequentially separated, but rather as parallel. Maximus himself says that "practice [πράξις] and contemplation [θεωρία] mutually cohere with each other, and the one is never separated from the other; on the contrary, practice shows forth through conduct the knowledge [γνῶσις] derived from contemplation, while contemplation, no less than reason, fortifies itself with virtue [ἀρετή] derived from practice."[166]

The soteriological significance of the unity of practice and contempla-

160. *De charitate*, II.26.

161. See ibid., I.97–99.

162. Ibid., I.92.

163. Ibid., II.27.

164. Ibid., I.100.

165. In this passage Maximus says that the one who imitates God arrives at detachment through practice, and then "he gathers up the principles of creatures and is religiously nourished with the divine knowledge of beings" (*Capita gnostica*, I.32).

166. *Ad Thalassium*, 31 (CCSG 22:31), cited in Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 134.

tion comes to light when Maximus proclaims that the mystery of salvation shows that "practice is an active contemplation, and contemplation is a mystagogic practice, or in one word, that virtue is a manifestation of knowledge, and knowledge is the force that preserves virtue."[167] As a result, practice and contemplation, together with virtue and knowledge as their correlatives, are obviously united in leading man to God, since the one conditions and confirms the other, and vice versa.[168] This synergy of the two aspects of development is testified also in Maximus's description of the soul as consisting of an intellectual and a vital faculty, wherein contemplative power belongs to the intellectual faculty, while active power belongs to the vital faculty. Furthermore, contemplative power is called the mind, while the active power is called reason:

> The former, that is, the mind, is and is called wisdom when it directs its proper movements altogether unswervingly toward God. In the same way the reason is and is called prudence when in uniting to the mind the activities of the vital faculty wisely governed by it in sensible direction, it shows that it is not different from it but bears the same divine image by virtues as does the mind. This image, he added, is naturally shared by both mind and reason as the soul was previously proven to consist of mind and reason because it is intellectual and rational and the vital is equally evident in both mind and reason—for it is not licit to think of either as deprived of life—and thus shared by both.[169]

Mind and reason, then, are not different from each other, but they do bear the same divine image and share the same life. However, their parallelism and synergy are not automatic and should not be taken for granted—there is always a possibility of one prevailing over the other, but that is not the path that leads to God. Maximus is equally eager to condemn both those who seek knowledge without practice and those who exercise the praxis without advancing in contemplation. Therefore, "the one who seeks knowledge for the sake of display . . . must be diligent in readying himself for knowledge by practice, first on the body, then on the soul,"[170] but at the same time, those who hold only to the word of Scripture, and pursue only a practical life without contemplation, live in darkness and feel "with both hands nothing but ignorance of God."[171] Only through practice and theory, that is, through acquiring both virtues and knowledge, can one get closer to God:

167. Ibid., 63 (CCSG 22:171).
168. See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 453.
169. *Mystagogia*, 5 (CCSG 69:20–21).
170. *Capita gnostica*, I.20.
171. Ibid., II.41–42.

When the Word of God is exalted in us through asceticism and contemplation, he draws everyone to himself, sanctifying our thoughts and ideas about the flesh and the soul and the nature of things, as well as these members and senses of the body by virtue and knowledge, and bringing them under his yoke. Therefore the one who is a witness of divine things should quickly ascend and follow the Word until he arrives at the place where he is.[172]

This close relationship between the practical and contemplative aspects of a Christian's life shows not only that the two go hand in hand, but also that they are both significant for deification. The ascension to Christ and dwelling with him certainly means deification, which operates through the intellectual and physical approaches to God, through virtue and knowledge. It also confirms Maximus's idea that deification is not the result of natural powers but divine grace—that is why the passage states that it is God who draws everyone to himself, and that he sanctifies mind and body and brings them "under his yoke."

The correlation between praxis, contemplation, and grace is once again reaffirmed by Maximus in explaining the Spirit's descent ten days after Christ's ascent:

For since the word of God has been concealed in his ten commandments, and is embodied in us, descending in us through the practice [of the commandments], and again it leads us up, raising us through knowledge, until we come to the more lofty of all the commandments, which says, "the Lord is your God, the Lord is one." For when being released from all things, or rather, releasing all things, our *nous* will end in God himself, [and] then receive the fiery tongues, becoming God by grace.[173]

Here the Confessor shows how practice and theory correlate to God's descent and man's ascent, which again reminds one of the reciprocity of incarnation and deification, and the *tantum–quantum* formula. It is indeed reciprocal, not unilateral, since it implies an active role on the part of the human being, in order for the incarnation to be realized—the observance of the commandments is not just an ethical prescription, it is much more than that, since it manifests God in man, God descends and then incarnates in man through practice, while the other side of the coin, the other aspect of the reciprocity, is man's ascent to God through contemplation. The result of such a process is a fully incarnated God and a fully deified

172. Ibid., II.32.
173. *Quaestiones et dubia*, 142.

man.[174] The practice of the commandments is in fact testimony to God's presence:

> God the Word of God the Father is mystically present in each of his own commandments. God the Father is by nature completely inseparable in the whole of his Word. Therefore the one who receives the divine commandment and accomplishes it receives in it the Word of God. The one who has received the Word through the commandments has received along with him the Father who is in him by nature, as well as the Spirit who is also in him by nature.… Therefore the one who has accepted a commandment and performed it has received in mystical possession the Holy Trinity.[175]

The idea of Christ's embodiment through virtues is something that Maximus repeats on several occasions. Thus, he says that "in the active person the Word grows fat by the practice of the virtues and becomes flesh," while "in the contemplative it grows lean and becomes as it was in the beginning, God the Word."[176] This is the twofold presence of Christ who, in the first instance, is present in the world and in the person through virtues, while the second instance represents flight from the material toward the spiritual presence of Logos.[177] Just like the observance of the commandments, the practice of virtue is, therefore, the sign of the presence of Christ, who is "the substance of virtue":

> The essence in every virtue is the one Logos of God … as it is written: God made him our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption. These things are of course said about him in an absolute sense, for he is Wisdom and Righteousness and Sanctification itself, and not in some limited sense, as is the case with human beings, as for example in the expression "wise man" or "just man." Which is to say that anyone who through fixed habit participates in virtue, unquestionably participates in God, who is the substance of the virtues.[178]

Participation in virtue as participation in God obviously has ontological implications. This is no surprise, especially if one bears in mind Maximus's idea of the *logos* of being preexisting in God. Thus, he has no hesitation in calling the virtues natural.[179] However, if virtues are natural and

174. We should always bear in mind that, despite the heavily present ethical elements, Christ's redeeming work is a restoration "in ontological, not moral terms"; Georges Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century* (Vaduz: Büchvertriebsanstalt, 1987), 236.

175. *Capita gnostica*, II.71.

176. Ibid., II.37.

177. Cf. Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 347.

178. *Ambiguorum liber 7*, 1081CD.

179. See *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, 309B.

nature is equal in all humankind, the conclusion drawn from this would be that all men are equally virtuous, though this is evidently not the case. The problem, according to Maximus, is that human beings, in their fallen state, do not act according to their nature—their mode of existence is opposed to their *logos*, and thus they show differences in virtues. Therefore, the task is to turn to one's own proper being and act according to the *logos* in the striving toward life in God. This is clearly exemplified when Maximus talks about the triad of being, saying that "[a person] comes to be *in* God through attentiveness, since he has not falsified the *logos* of being that preexists in God; and he *moves* in God in accordance with the *logos* of well-being that preexists in God, since he is moved to action by the virtues; and he *lives* in God in accordance with the *logos* of eternal-being that also preexists in God."[180]

Acquiring virtues, then, through the practical life is a step toward attaining well-being, it is acting in accordance with the *logos* of being. The logical triad implies that well-being is the actualization of the *logos* of being, and it depends on man's choice and effort. Consequently, the practice of virtues relies on man's decision to acquire and exercise them, but if this means acting in accordance with the *logos* of being, then it is implied that virtues are given to nature in this very *logos* of being. What follows is that virtues are, as Tollefsen argues, given to nature in terms of a potentiality that needs to be actualized,[181] and "the capital virtues of each faculty should be regarded as the proper use of that faculty."[182] Maximus seems here to be in relative disagreement[183] with Aristotle's view that "the virtues therefore are engendered in us neither by nature nor yet in violation of nature; nature gives us the capacity to receive them, and this capacity is brought to maturity by habit."[184] While Maximus and Aristotle seem to disagree on whether virtues are natural or not, they seem to be in agreement when it comes to the natural potentiality of developing them through the practical life.

The improper use of the faculties, on the other hand, leads to ill-being:

180. *Ambiguorum liber* 7, 1084B.

181. See Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology*, 121–22, and 180–81. See also Blowers, *Transfiguration of the World*, 271ff.

182. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 293.

183. I talk about a relative or apparent disagreement, since it seems that both Aristotle and Maximus claim that virtues are related to nature in terms of potentiality; the difference, however, is that Maximus thinks virtues are potentially contained *in* nature, while Aristotle thinks that they are received *from outside*.

184. Aristotle, *Ethica Nichomachea*, I.13, 1103A.

All things are, and have come to be, and remain always drawing closer to their own predetermined principles through natural motion, and ever more closely approximated to being by their particular kinds and degrees of motion and inclination of choice. They receive well-being through virtue and through their direct progress toward the principle according to which they exist; or they receive ill-being through vice and their movement contrary to the principle by which they exist.[185]

This passage confirms Maximus's idea of virtues as potentialities that need to be realized—if virtues were received in their actuality, then inclination and choice would play no role and there would be no sense in introducing ill-being into the picture. There is a place, therefore, for the active role of the creature in the overall divine scheme. In fact, this active role affirms deification as cooperation between God and man, which in turn is reflected through the incarnation of God in each individual who enables God to become human. In return, God offers deification:

So it does not seem, then, that the end of the ages[186] has come upon us since we have not yet received, by the grace that is in Christ, the gift of benefits that transcend time and nature. Meanwhile, the modes of the virtues and the principles of those things that can be known by nature have been established as types and foreshadowings of those future benefits. It is through these modes and principles that God, who is ever willing to become human, does so in those who are worthy. And therefore whoever, by the exercise of wisdom, enables God to become incarnate within him or her and, in fulfillment of this mystery, undergoes deification by grace, is truly blessed, because this deification has no end.[187]

"Modes of virtue" and "principles of things" that are known by nature, presented here as types of the future age, explain Maximus's claim that God is mystically present in the commandments and that Christ is the essence of virtues. Through the practical life, in fact, man receives a taste of the future age, because in practicing the commandments and exercising virtues he imitates and reflects God, thus receiving the grace which deifies him. Such a man Maximus sees in John Cubicularius, to whom he writes the *Epistula* 2: "For it seems to me to be right and the same thing, to praise you and virtue and to raise up hymns to God, who has granted to you the splendor of virtue, which deifies you by grace, by sublimating your human characteristics. In you virtue also makes God condescend to be human, by your

185. *Ambiguorum liber* 42, 1329A.
186. See ibid., 7, 1088BC.
187. *Ad Thalassium*, 22 (CCSG 7:141–43).

assumption, so far as is possible for human beings, of divine properties."[188]

On the other side of the coin are the principles (*logoi*) of all things which are known through natural contemplation. Since the *logoi* of beings are contained in Logos, then knowledge attained through the contemplation of *logoi* is in fact knowledge of God as the Cause and Creator of beings. This, of course, does not presuppose the knowledge of God in his essence, but only in his attributes, or energies, present in creatures and known as through mirrors.[189] Natural contemplation concerns all created things, both visible and invisible. Depending on the object of contemplation, its character is somewhat different:

> When the mind is established in contemplation of the visible creation, it examines either the natural *logoi* of things, or the *logoi* that they signify, or else it seeks the cause itself. Settled in the contemplation of the invisible, it seeks both the natural reasons of these things, the cause of their production and whatever is related to these; and also what providence and judgment there is about them.[190]

The contemplation of visible and invisible things, when they are taken together, discovers God as Cause and Creator, but also as Provider and Judge—it is in natural contemplation that ontological constitution and cosmological order come together. To know "what providence and judgment there is" about things means to know the world in its unity and differentiation, as Maximus explains in more detail:

> Motion … manifests the providence for beings, and through it we can contemplate the unvarying essential identity of beings in their particular species. In seeing these integral modes of distinct existence, we acquire the concept of him who holds together and preserves them all in an ineffable union, in such a way that each is clearly distinct and marked off from the other, consistent with the principles according to which they were created. Difference, moreover, signifies judgment, which is evident in the just distribution of a natural potential commensurate with the substrate of their being (in accordance with the principle of each), by which we are instructed that the wise distributor is God.[191]

Through this understanding of providence and judgment Maximus breaks away from Origen and Evagrius, and considers a different plan where judgment refers to the distinction of things which are then providentially, but without the destruction of their distinction, drawn to God. Thus, the Con-

188. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 408AB.
189. See *Ambiguorum liber* 20, 1241C; *De charitate*, I.96.
190. *De charitate*, I.98–99.
191. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1133CD.

fessor's understanding of these concepts shows how "divine judgment is regarded as a wise preparation for providential motion, and individuality and unifying relationship to God as Creator are closely kept together."[192]

What is also important is that Maximus develops the providence–judgment dialectic within his treatment of natural contemplation. According to him, there are five modes of natural contemplation, which concern being, movement, difference, position, and mixture. The first three, Maximus continues, lead to knowledge of God, while the last two concern virtue and assimilation to God. Being, movement, and difference allow one to know God as Creator, Provider, and Judge—this is how God manifests himself to men, and this is what can be concluded from things that exist. Importantly, Maximus emphasizes that in this way it is not possible to know *what* God is, but only *how* he is. Mixture and position concern our inclination and its character, and all five contemplations have a deifying significance:

> The two remaining modes [mixture and position] lead to virtue and affinity with God, since through mixture and position, man is molded and shaped into God, and from being a creature passively submits to becoming God, for the eye, as it were, of his intellect beholds the whole implicit trace of God's goodness, and through reason he gives this image a clear and distinct form within himself. For they say that what the pure intellect sees naturally through reverent knowledge it can also passively experience, becoming, through its habit of virtue, the very thing it sees.[193]

The world can be seen from the viewpoint of each of the forms of contemplation singularly, but it can also be seen through the combination of different forms, which reveal different aspects of the world. If viewed from the mode of position alone, all five contemplations are contracted into three: ethical, natural, and theological philosophy.[194] From the viewpoint of difference, these three are contracted into two—wisdom and philosophy—so that wisdom "contains and receives in a God-befitting manner all the reverent modes that pertain to it, enclosing within itself all the natural and hidden principles of other modes," while philosophy unifies "character and choice, practice and contemplation, and virtue and knowledge, and through affinity of relation refers them to wisdom as their cause."[195] Finally, seen from the point of mixture, as harmony, all contemplation is contract-

192. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 70. On this subject, see also Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 134–36; Törönen, *Union and Distinction*, 135–38.

193. *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1133BC.

194. See ibid., 1136C.

195. Ibid., 1136CD.

ed into one form by which "they transported their intellect through the principles of beings to their cause, and bound it to that cause alone, which gathers and unifies all that comes forth from it, and in this way they were no longer scattered in multiplicity, but had risen above the particular principles of individual beings."[196]

Evidently, knowledge of God is another step within the triad of being, whose purpose is deiformity, since to contemplatives Logos is "bread, which turns the spiritual part of their soul to perfect godlikeness."[197] In addition, this proves one more time the cooperative character of deification, because God makes himself known as the cause through the *logoi* which are contemplated, and he also draws creatures to himself:

> The soul would never be able to reach the knowledge of God if God did not allow himself to be touched by it through condescension and by raising it up to him. Indeed, the human mind as such would not have the strength to raise itself to apprehend any divine illumination did not God himself draw it up, as far as it is possible for the human mind to be drawn, and illumine it with divine brightness.[198]

This introduces us to the third step of the spiritual development, namely mystical theology: "From this moment on the soul is rendered as far as possible simple and indivisible by its instruction, having encompassed by knowledge the principles of both sensible and intelligible things … the Word then leads it to the knowledge of theology."[199] This stage, for Maximus, is above nature and natural contemplation, it is above all sensible and intelligible things and their qualities.[200] Moreover, it is a state in which the mind "in supreme ignorance supremely knows the supremely Unknowable,"[201] by being illumined by the divine light.[202] This is the stage, therefore, in which perfect knowledge coincides with perfect unknowing,[203] and implies surpassing all knowing and sensing:

> The mind that enters into mystical theology … has an uncovered head, which is Christ: that is, him who is conceived without normal knowledge, through indemonstrable mystical doctrines, or, more precisely, the Word of faith who is known

196. Ibid., 1137A.
197. *Capita gnostica*, II.66.
198. Ibid., I.31.
199. *Mystagogia*, 23 (CCSG 69:52).
200. See *Ambiguorum liber* 10, 1141B, 1193D.
201. *De charitate*, III.99.
202. See, for example, ibid., I.10.
203. One should always bear in mind the difference between ἀγνωσία and ἄγνοια, the former being the supreme state of mystical unknowing, the latter being simple ignorance in a negative sense.

without knowledge. No existent thing is placed above him: neither sense, reason, mind, thought, knowledge; nor anything known, conceived, spoken, sensed; nor anyone who uses the sense. The mind cherishes this laudable and utter void that transcends itself and created beings, and that is, in a different respect, a deifying void.[204]

The surpassing of all physical and noetic activity, and entering mystical theology, clearly displays the ultimate deified character. Being above knowledge and action means proximity to and life in God. Mystical theology, then, seems to be the culmination and summit of the previous two stages, which implies passing beyond the active and contemplative life in order to reach true Life, which is in God, by means of the "grace of theology."[205] Knowledge that comes from mystical theology is deifying and unites man with God, because it proceeds directly from him, and not indirectly as is the case with natural and other forms of knowledge.[206] Maximus explains this point further in his treatment of the Sabbath:

> The one who has divinely accomplished in himself the sixth day by appropriate works and thoughts, and who has with God nobly brought his work to an end, has crossed by comprehension all the ground of what is subject to nature and to time. He is transported to the mystical contemplation of the immortal ages, and in an unknowable manner he makes Sabbath in his mind in leaving behind and totally surpassing beings. The one who has become worthy of the eighth day is risen from the dead, that is, from what is less than God: sensible and intelligible things, words, and thoughts; and he lives the blessed life of God, who alone is said to be and is in very truth the Life, in such a way that he becomes himself God by deification.[207]

Mystical theology represents deification and life in God, and therefore it refers to the third member of the triad of being, namely, eternal-being. Participating in eternal-being (or, more precisely, eternal-well-being) is something that, as Maximus repeats many times, does not depend on the human being, but on God's grace alone. In this state, natural activity of the creature is suspended and fulfilled through God himself, while it also preserves its essence at the same time. By participating in eternal-well-being and by taking on its natural activities realized through God, the creature attains simple and total knowledge of God. However, as Thunberg concludes, this knowledge is not just the supreme form of knowledge, but "it

204. *Ad Thalassium*, 25 (CCSG 7:161), cited in Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 202.
205. *De charitate*, II.26.
206. See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 516.
207. *Capita gnostica*, I.54.

is a relationship, above all knowledge that human beings can imagine, with a God who is himself above knowledge."[208]

Just as it was possible to trace the parallels between the triad of being and the triad of spiritual development, so it is possible to relate the latter to the Church. In his *Mystagogy*, Maximus explains how the Church should be seen as a plurality of images (icons): of God; of the world composed of invisible and visible essences; of the sensible world alone; of man; and of the soul.[209] The Church as the image of man symbolically represents practical philosophy, natural contemplation, and mystical theology: "It is thus the image and likeness of man who is created in the image and likeness of God. By means of the nave, representing the body, it proposes moral wisdom, while by means of the sanctuary, representing the soul, it spiritually interprets natural contemplation, and by means of the mind of the divine altar it manifests mystical theology."[210] The same motif works the other way around, so that man is seen as a mystical church:

> Through the nave which is his body he brightens by virtue the ascetic force of the soul by the observance of the commandments in moral wisdom. Through the sanctuary of his soul he conveys to God in natural contemplation through reason the principles of sense purely in spirit cut off from matter. Finally, through the altar of the mind he summons the silence abounding in song in the innermost recesses of the unseen and unknown utterance of divinity by another silence, rich in speech and tone.[211]

An additional parallel drawn by Maximus within the field of ecclesiology exists between the three stages of spiritual development and the three laws, natural law, scriptural law, and the law of grace: "For the entire orderly arrangement of the Church is encompassed in these three laws."[212] If the ecclesiological arrangement is ordered by the three laws, and the three laws, as we have seen, are expressions of God's threefold embodiment, then

208. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 357.

209. Maximus's ecclesiology has been studied in more detail in Riou, *Le monde et l'Église*; Matsoukas, *La vie en Dieu*, 233–64; Irénée-Henri Dalmais, "Mystère liturgique et divinisation dans la 'Mystagogie' de saint Maxime le Confesseur," in *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, ed. J. Fontaine and Ch. Kannengiesser (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 55–62; Georges Dion Dragas, "The Church in St Maximus's Mystagogy," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1987): 113–29; Larchet, *La divinisation*, 399–435; Andrew Louth, "The Ecclesiology of St Maximos the Confessor," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 4, no. 2 (2004): 109–20; Pascal Mueller-Jourdan, *Typologie spatio-temporelle de l'Ecclesia byzantine: La Mystagogie de Maxime le Confesseur dans la culture philosophique de l'Antiquité tardive* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

210. *Mystagogia*, 4 (CCSG 69:18).

211. Ibid.

212. *Ad Thalassium*, 64 (CCSG 22:239).

it is safe to say that the Church, for Maximus, is the bearer of God's incarnation; and since incarnation and deification are reciprocal, then the Church is the institution that brings about deification. The Church is, in fact, the image of God; and it works "for us the same effects as God," which means gathering into communion all its members with each other and with God—just as God unites different natures without confusing them, so the Church brings together the faithful, regardless of their differences in language, race, and customs.[213]

According to Maximus, the Church is the milieu of deification, and sacraments are its means.[214] The sacraments, in fact, celebrate mysteries of human salvation, whose first condition is baptism: "Through them [mysteries], in making each of us who conducts himself worthily as best he can in Christ, it brings to light the grace of adoption which was given through holy baptism in the Holy Spirit and which makes us perfect in Christ."[215] Baptism, which brings about the grace of adoption, is a prerequisite for deification, in that it offers to the baptized the potential for deification, while its actualization is realized through the practical life and contemplation.[216] The connections between baptism, spiritual development, free will, and deification come to light in a passage from *Ambiguum* 42:

> Man in the beginning was created according to the image of God, surely so that he might be born of the Spirit in the exercise of his own free choice, and to acquire in addition the likeness by the keeping of the divine commandment, so that the same man, being by nature a creation of God, might also be the son of God and God though the Spirit by grace. For there was no other way for man, being created, to become the son of God and God by the grace of divinization, without first being born of the Spirit, in the exercise of his free choice.[217]

The birth in the Spirit through baptism was introduced because Adam chose against divine birth and was condemned to bodily birth—baptism is God's concession for the sake of human salvation and the restoration of grace. Bodily birth and birth in Spirit, according to Maximus, are connected, as are the principles of being and well-being. Through this connection God bridged "the division and distance between them that I had opened up, and through

213. See *Mystagogia*, 1 (CCSG 69:14).

214. I borrow these expressions from Polycarp Sherwood, introduction to *The Ascetic Life: The Four Centuries on Charity*, by Maximus the Confessor (New York: Newman Press, 1955), 77.

215. *Mystagogia*, 24 (CCSG 69:66).

216. See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 387.

217. *Ambiguorum liber* 42, 1345D.

them he wisely drew me to the principle of eternal-being."[218] Baptism is therefore an affirmation of human free will, it is a step toward well-being, and it involves the kind of life which leads to receiving eternal-being by grace of deification. At the core of the rite of baptism, performed in the Church, there is the immersion and the emergence of the baptized, which correspond to Christ's burial and resurrection, with the expectation "that in the appropriate time there will also be the absolute true resurrection."[219]

The communion, or synaxis, is the central sacrament operated within the Church, and Maximus describes it at length.[220] Each step in the ecclesial proceedings brings the believer closer to God, as it increases faith, develops virtues and knowledge, puts an end to passions and "earthly thinking," etc.[221] All of this has the purpose of attaining deification: "By holy communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries we are given fellowship and identity with him by participation in likeness, by which man is deemed worthy from man to become God."[222] The final outcome is "the adoption and union, as well as familiarity and divine likeness and deification which come about through goodness of our God in every way on all the worthy, whereby God himself will be 'all in all.'"[223]

In the end we can summarize the previous discussion on deification in Maximus through some general points: First, deification is the realization of God's plan for his creation.

Second, this idea is intrinsically related to the triad of being / well-being / eternal-being, by which the creature is, is well, and is eternally in God. The first and the last elements are given by God's grace, so that both creation and deification as immortality are God's gifts and cannot be attained by the creature's nature alone.

Third, the doctrine of *logoi* plays an important role in the entire process since through it the creature participates in God in whom all *logoi* preexisted.

Fourth, while being and eternal-being are the results of God's grace, the orientation of the middle state of being is dependent on being's free choice. Depending on the direction of being's mode (*tropos*) of existence, it attains well-being or ill-being. This idea represents affirmation of the creature's free

218. Ibid., 1348D.

219. *Quaestiones et dubia*, 115.

220. See *Mystagogia*, 24. For a description and an interpretation of different parts of the sacrament see Louth, "Ecclesiology of St Maximos the Confessor," 113–14.

221. See also Dragas, "Church in St Maximus's Mystagogy," 125–28.

222. *Mystagogia*, 24 (CCSG 69:58).

223. Ibid.

will and testifies that deification is to be chosen by the creature; it is not forcefully imposed on it.

Fifth, consequently, deification is not a moment or a unilateral act—it is a process of cooperation between God and man.

Sixth, this cooperation operates through the reciprocity between incarnation and deification, which means that God becomes human as much as a human being becomes God. Such a relationship is expressed by Maximus through the idea that God and man are paradigms of one another.

Seventh, the reciprocity of God's incarnation and human deification carries the idea that God and man exchange their properties in a *perichoretic* embrace, that is, in the interpenetration of their respective natures. This *communicatio idiomatum* is based on the dyophysite understanding of Christology, in terms of the unconfused union of divine and human natures in Christ.

Eighth, in this way, the Christological basis makes clear that deification is possible in the hypostatic union of human and divine natures. It allows for the affirmation of the inalterability and integrity of each nature, which safeguards the totality of human nature in a deified state, but it also enables the multiplicity of their unity in a union without confusion. Within the *logos–tropos* distinction this means that *logos* remains unchanged, while the *tropos* suffers alterations, which again means that deification happens not in the *logos* of essence, but in the *tropos* of existence.

Ninth, the triad of being is closely connected with threefold spiritual development through practical philosophy, natural contemplation, and mystical theology. Within this scheme, epistemology and ethics go hand in hand toward attaining the state of deification. Practical philosophy consists in purification from passions, the development of virtues, and observance of the commandments. Natural contemplation implies investigation into the visible and invisible realities by which the being acquires knowledge about the *logoi* of beings, in order to become familiar with the ontological and cosmological structure of the world, which leads to knowledge of God as the cause of creation in its entirety. Practical philosophy and natural contemplation are exercised in parallel, and they represent steps toward well-being. Their end and culmination is in mystical theology, which is the highest form of knowledge and coincides apophatically with total unknowing and silence, a state characterized by the suspension of all physical and noetic activities. This final stage is the deified state of eternal-well-being.

Tenth, deification happens within the Church and through its sacraments. The Church imitates God and brings together all differentiated believers into communion with each other and with God. The necessary sacramental prerequisite is baptism, which represents the link to well-being but has to be built upon through leading the good practical life. Through communion, believers participate in God and gain fellowship with him, which ultimately means that they become God by grace.

CONCLUSION

Love and Beauty in Deification

In the preceding chapters I tried to present a detailed, yet synoptic, elaboration of the three main concepts that concern this book in the framework of Dionysius the Areopagite's and Maximus the Confessor's thought. This task was not at all an easy undertaking, for on the one hand it involved three concepts present in two thinkers, thus implying a certain abundance of materials and ideas, and on the other hand it required a selective approach and condensed exposition that could not afford to be tempted into pretending to be exhaustive and complete. However, I believe that my treatment of each of these concepts provided an insight into the main features of Dionysius's and Maximus's erotology, aesthetics, and soteriology, and that each of the chapters provided a hint about the subsequent one, thus making it possible to collect different pieces of the puzzle and assemble them in a more general picture of the erotic-aesthetic dimension of deification.

As noted in the introduction, the relationship between the erotic and the aesthetic has a long history, and love and beauty are perhaps the most famous philosophical "couple" in this respect. According to Plato, the function of eros is to generate in the beautiful, and Diotima argues that this desire to create in the beautiful is in fact an expression of the quest for immortality: "Through this device, Socrates, a mortal thing partakes of immortality, both in its body and in all other respects; by no other means can it be done."[1] Achieving immortality, then, is a result of eros as the desire to

1. Plato, *Symposium*, 208B.

give birth in the beautiful. This Platonic relationship between love, beauty, and immortality is reminiscent of what we have seen in the previous chapters regarding the Christian understanding of love and beauty, together with the doctrine of deification, which presupposes immortality. In the following pages I shall present a synthetic view of what has been said so far, in an attempt to show the interaction between love and beauty within the process of deification, as seen in our two authors.

Deification as Loving Cooperation

First of all, it should be noted that in both Dionysius and Maximus, deification is seen as a process of cooperation, or synergy, between God and the creature. This process should be understood in terms of a mutual giving-receiving, in which, to speak in Dionysian language, God gives himself outwardly to the creation, while the creation returns to God by actualizing its power for deification. The actualization of powers, however, does not constitute the condition of grace, but it refers to the receptivity of it—as Maximus claims, grace is gratuitous,[2] which means that the capacity of receiving it is itself conferred by grace. I think that this is what Dionysius has in mind when he says that God "grants the power for deification,"[3] while the Confessor states that the divine image persuades the soul to transform itself freely to the likeness of God.[4] In both thinkers, then, attaining deification implies self-realization and the actualization of natural powers, which is closely related to the free will of beings and does not negate the "unrelatedness" of grace which is unconditioned—the actualization of human powers comes into play when human natural energy is at work together with the divine energy.[5]

The cooperation between God and man receives its highest expression in Maximus's idea of God and man as paradigms of each other in the reciprocal relationship between incarnation and deification. Such a view of incarnation as the basis for deification is shared by the Areopagite, too, who claims that by taking on human nature, God "made it possible for us to enter into communion with himself and with divine reality."[6] The decision of

2. See Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 20, 1237A.

3. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, VIII.5, 893A.

4. See Maximus, *Expositio orationis dominicae*, 889B.

5. Creatures have an active role in determining the extent of their deification or damnation. See a detailed discussion in Marius Portaru, "Gradual Participation according to St Maximus the Confessor," *Studia patristica* 54 (2012): 281–94.

6. Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.3.7, 436D.

God to take on human nature, thus revealing himself and allowing the deification of the creation, testifies to another idea shared by both authors—the necessity of God's grace as the *conditio sine qua non* of human beings becoming gods. This revelation and manifestation of God is actualized not only through historical incarnation through Christ, but also through divine activities or attributes, which are, as we have seen, accessible in ontological, cosmological, ecclesiological, and epistemological ambits. However, questions remain as to whether these "intimations" of God are readily and immediately accessible to the creation, and whether the creation's ascent to God and its deification is something that is operated automatically. The answer that follows from our analysis of the concept of deification in Dionysius and Maximus is simply "no"; although this demands further inquiry to determine the connection between God's descent and creation's ascent—what is the common ingredient that allows incarnation–deification reciprocity to be possible? Perhaps the most concise and valuable answer to this question is offered by Maximus himself, who writes: "For it is the most perfect work of love and the goal of its activity, to contrive through the mutual exchange of what is related that the names and properties of those that have been united through love should be fitting to each other. So the human being is made God, and God is called and appears as human."[7]

Love is therefore presented as the vehicle of incarnation–deification dialectics, which is at the core of Maximus's entire vision. The basic idea of two lovers who are united and exchange their properties so that they belong to each other appears here as the essential character of the relationship between God and man. Love is the outreaching of God toward humanity and vice versa. This love, by which God makes himself available and descends toward the creation and love by which creation responds to God by ascending to him, is the same love that the Areopagite describes by his types of eros ἔρως προνοητικός and ἔρως ἐπιστρεπτικός. In a significant passage, Dionysius puts together beauty and the specific love for humanity, God's philanthropy, by coupling it with incarnation:

> They call it Cause of beings since in its goodness it employed its creative power to summon all things into being, and it is hailed as wise and beautiful because beings which keep their nature uncorrupted are filled with divine harmony and sacred beauty. But they especially call it loving toward humanity, because in one of its persons it accepted a true share of what it is we are, and thereby issued a call to man's lowly state to rise up to it.[8]

7. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 401B.
8. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, I.4, 592A.

CONCLUSION

The paradox in which ontologically different entities exchange their properties and become one another, namely, God who becomes man and man who becomes God, is possible only in the ecstatic character of love, so that the lovers go out of themselves in order to reach the beloved in a mystical union. Dionysius understands this as the common mark of each form of love, when he explains that the divine eros brings ecstasy "so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved," which is shown by superiors in their providence toward subordinates, as well as in the return of the subordinate to the superior.[9] Love, desire, and ecstasy are intrinsically interwoven since they point to the motion that seeks the beloved as its rest; thus Maximus writes:

> If an intellective being is moved intellectively, that is, in a manner appropriate to itself, then it will necessarily become a knowing intellect. But if it knows, it surely loves that which it knows; and if it loves, it certainly suffers an ecstasy toward it as an object of love. If it suffers this ecstasy, it obviously urges itself onward; and if it urges itself onward, it surely intensifies and greatly accelerates its motion. And if its motion is intensified in this way, it will not cease until it is wholly present in the whole beloved, and wholly encompassed by it … and will no longer be able to wish to be known from its own qualities, but rather from those of the circumscriber.[10]

The rest from this motion is found in God as the ultimate object of desire, so that the creature "dwells entirely in God alone in a loving ecstasy [κατ' ἐρωτικὴν ἔκστασιν], and has rendered itself by mystical theology totally immobile in God."[11] This is the same state that the Areopagite wishes to emphasize by drawing on the example of St. Paul, whom he considers his teacher, and who "swept along by his yearning for God and seized of its ecstatic power," was "truly a lover … possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned, as exceptionally beloved."[12] The ecstasy of the "true lover" implies a sort of total dispossession of the self,[13] in which the soul will "know divine things all the more as it does not want to be its own nor able to be recognized from or by itself or anyone else's,"[14] but wishes to be completely possessed by God and thus deified. Evidently

9. Ibid., IV.13, 712A.

10. Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 7, 1073CD.

11. Maximus, *Capita gnostica*, I.39. See also *Quaestiones et dubia*, 180, where Maximus says that the Holy Spirit deifies through grace by "the ecstatic and intoxicating participation of the good things."

12. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, IV.13, 712A.

13. See Larchet, *La divinisation*, 535.

14. Maximus, *Mystagogia*, 23 (CCSG 69:54).

such dispossession of the self implies an epistemological moment in which the soul surpasses the acquired knowledge available to creatures—this is what is meant by "render[ing] itself by mystical theology totally immobile in God,"[15] since mystical theology is the summit of all knowledge that ends in unknowing and silence. As a result, Maximus's work in this respect is in line with his predecessor Dionysius:

> Timothy, my friend, my advice to you as you look for a sight of the mysterious things, is to leave behind you everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge. By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is.[16]

Clearly, Dionysius's apophatic theology is not just a sort of a philosophy of language or a logical method; on the contrary, it implies abandoning all rational and intellectual activity—it is beyond discourse and coincides with absolute silence.[17] This notion points to the view that apophatic theology, rather than being a discursive procedure, bears a distinctive empirical mark as the mystical experience given by God's grace.[18] In this sense, Dionysius's and Maximus's apophatic theology does not collapse into an agnostic apophaticism, but quite the contrary, it envisions direct mystical knowledge of God. In addition, this leads to the understanding that union with God is not something that can be achieved by human faculties alone, because then an activity would be present; on the contrary, it is the union granted by God's grace through the rupture with intellect which is iden-

15. See note 11 above.

16. Dionysius, *De mystica theologia* I.1, 997B–1000A.

17. In her article "Philosophie et union mystique," Andia talks about two lines of reading *Mystical Theology*, one of which goes from word to silence, while the other proceeds from knowledge to unknowing (*Denys l'Aréopagite*, 54). However, these should be seen as a single path, since abolishing language runs parallel with abolishing knowledge—language expresses knowledge, and silence expresses unknowing, so the two mold into one.

18. It is therefore surprising that Raoul Mortley claims that "the *via negativa* is a technique conceived for Greek intellectual problems, and was only useful to Christianity insofar as it became Hellenized" (Mortley, *From Word to Silence: The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek* [Bonn: Hanstein, 1986], 274). It seems to me that such claims result from an incorrect identification of apophatic theology with the Western *via negativa*, and its incomplete understanding, which fails to acknowledge its experiential character. Apophatic theology, therefore, is not just a result of a sort of Hellenization of Christianity, but it forms an important part of Christian thought throughout the centuries, and is present in Clement of Alexandria, the Cappadocians, Dionysius, Maximus, Gregory Palamas, and others. See, for example, Amfilohije Radović, Το μυστήριον τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιον Γρηγόριον Παλαμᾶν (Thessaloniki: PIPM, 1973), 32–33; Bergmann, *Creation Set Free*, 109, 200ff.

tified with ecstasy and non-activity[19]—the dispossession of the self and suspension of all physical and noetic activity is a mirror of divine–human giving and receiving that culminates in acquiring the highest form of unknowing knowledge in the ineffable and mystical union between God and man. This is the same view that Maximus holds regarding mystical theology, which is a movement "of the soul circling around God in a manner beyond knowledge, for the soul does not know God after the manner of beings, owing it to God's absolute transcendence of beings."[20] This kind of knowledge is a feature of the perfect mind that "knows in supreme ignorance the supremely unknowable."[21]

Such an idea of unknowing as the highest form of knowledge, together with the relationship between intellectual and empirical aspects of approaching God, provides an opportunity to assess the connection between love and knowledge. For this purpose let us remember Maximus's words whereby "placed in God, and inflamed with desire" the mind seeks grounds of God's being, which are nevertheless inaccessible, and the only possible knowledge is knowledge of God's attributes.[22] However, even if attaining complete knowledge of God's being is impossible, the mind can enter into a total union with God, and this is brought about by love. Therefore, while in terms of epistemology it is not possible to know God completely, in terms of experience it is possible to be in loving union with him, which is why Maximus claims also that "knowledge necessarily stands in need of charity."[23] Similarly, the Areopagite places great emphasis on γνῶσις as a correlative of deification, but, as we have seen,[24] knowledge is not a sign of discrimination or unequal deification of the creation. Dionysius himself understands love as the main mark of the relationship between God and man, and thus he says that "God's word gives the title of 'gods' not only to those heavenly beings who are our superiors, but also to those sacred men among us who are distinguished for their love of God."[25] Therefore, not only celestial beings, whose knowledge of God is more direct and higher than that of human beings, are deified, that is, called gods, but the same applies to human beings too as a result of their love for God and God's love

19. See José María Nieva, *Ver en el no-ver: Ensayo crítico sobre el* De Mystica Teología *de Dionisio Areopagita* (Tucumàn: Universidad nacional de Tucumàn, 2010), 168.

20. Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 10, 1112D–1113A.

21. Maximus, *De charitate*, III.99.

22. Ibid., I.100.

23. Ibid., IV.62.

24. See the section on epistemology in the above chapter on deification in Dionysius.

25. Dionysius, *De coelesti hierarchia*, XII.3, 293B.

for them. Thus Thunberg's conclusion that "only the desirous attachment to Him [God] in perfect charity which ends in 'ecstasy' unites man fully with God"[26] applies to both Maximus and Dionysius.

The concept of love as a mark of the mutual relationship between God and his creation implies the affirmation of free will, as there can be no love which is not rooted in freedom. Both of our authors are aware of this point, although the issue of will is far more developed in Maximus, given the circumstances of the Monothelite controversy in which he actively participated. The very acts of creation and incarnation are expressions of God's free will; the creature responds by freely returning to God. There can be no constrictions on either side. Thus, Dionysius quite clearly states his position: "Therefore we should ignore the popular notion that Providence will lead us to virtue even against our will. Providence does not destroy nature. Indeed its character as Providence is shown by the fact that it saves the nature of each individual so that the free may freely act as individuals or as groups, in this providing power appropriate to each one."[27]

Our author is quite aware of the problem that the annihilation of free will might cause—if there is not free will, nature will be destroyed; however, providential work means the preservation and salvation of nature, not its destruction, and therefore free will must be safeguarded. And this is precisely what Maximus is at pains to affirm in his distinction between *logos* and *tropos*, as well as his insistence on the cooperation of the creature's free will with God's grace. This is why he warns that one should "make free will a partner of nature"[28] or that "there was no other way for man, being created, to become the son of God and God by the grace of divinization, without first being born of the Spirit, in the exercise of his free choice."[29] Deification is therefore not something imposed on the creature: it has to be freely accepted. The authentic free will implies accordance with the *logos*, with nature; and it means freedom from sin, passion, and corruptibility. This is where love, as the summit of the virtues, comes into play. The acquisition, or rather re-discovery, of virtues and purification from passions is a step toward assimilation to God and final union with him: "They who have acquired the perfection of love for God and have elevated the wing of the soul through the virtues according to the Apostle, 'are caught up in the

26. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 322.
27. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, IV.33, 733BC.
28. Maximus, *Expositio orationis dominicae*, 905A.
29. Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 42, 1345D.

clouds' and do not come into judgment."[30] All virtues, in fact, lead to love as their end and the supreme good of all goods.[31] The Areopagite also is explicit when it comes to links between love, virtues, and union with God:

> Indeed we see some already united here and now with God, for they are the lovers of truth and have abandoned the passion for material goods. They are completely free from all evils and are stirred by a divine longing for all good things. They love peace and holiness. In this life they look forward to the coming life. Free of all passion they live like angels among men. They praise the divine name ceaselessly. They practice goodness and every other virtue.[32]

The acquisition of virtues and purification from passions in terms of overcoming attachment to the flesh are the conditions for "the highest possible measure of divinization."[33] Such claims were not foreign to the ancient philosophical tradition; for instance, one might recall Plato and his statement that to be virtuous is to be like God as far as it is possible for a human being,[34] which he repeats in *Theaetetus* by describing the escape from earth to heaven as the likeness to God achieved through the virtues.[35] This, however, should not be understood as "withdrawal from the world, but as a radically transformed set of priorities with which one engages the world."[36] Being godlike, therefore, has an ethical component in Plato's thought, as it means to lead a virtuous life. This is not far from what our two authors have in mind. In Dionysius's view, as a matter of fact, virtues are precisely the distinctive proof of what we call good or evil—evil does not exist in essence, in nature, and therefore only the possession or lack of virtues distinguishes evil from good: "They are called evil because of the deprivation, the abandonment, the rejection of the virtues which are appropriate to them."[37] Virtues are therefore appropriate to nature, and evil means the rejection or abandonment of these virtues—to be evil basically means to be contrary to nature. This is what the Confessor developed further in his theory of virtues as natural,[38] in terms of the good use of natural faculties,

30. Maximus, *Quaestiones et dubia*, I.10.

31. See Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 401C.

32. Dionysius, *Epistula* X, 1117B.

33. Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.3.7, 433C.

34. See Plato, *Republic*, 613AB.

35. See Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176AC.

36. Daniel C. Russell, "Virtue as 'Likeness to God' in Plato and Seneca," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42, no. 3 (2004): 260.

37. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, IV.23, 725C.

38. The question of the relationship between nature and virtues has marked the history of philosophy. I have already mentioned Aristotle's conclusion that virtues are neither by nature nor in

and in the same vein he develops his conceptions of love, freedom, and virtues in the transition from being to well-being. Love, for Maximus, is both the center of all virtues[39] and the summit of all commandments,[40] while its best expression and divinizing power is synthesized through love toward those in need, which represents the peak of the Confessor's aretology and moral philosophy:

> The clear proof of this grace is the voluntary disposition of good will toward those akin to us. . . . Now nothing is either so fitting for justification or so apt for divinization, if I can speak thus, and nearness to God as mercy offered with pleasure and joy from the soul to those who stand in need. For if the Word has shown that the one who is in need of having good done to him is God—for as long, he tells us, as you did it for the one of these least ones, you did it for me—on God's very own word, then, he will much more show that the one who can do good and who does it is truly God by grace and participation because he has taken on in happy imitation the energy and characteristic of his own doing good.[41]

This is exactly what Dionysius has in mind when talking about practicing goodness and all other virtues, as well as when he explains how it is not enough to preserve one's own virtues but that it is necessary to give oneself actively.[42] Dionysius is clear that the necessary conditions for deification are baptism and a way of life which consists in imitating the divine example.[43] However, these ideas have not only ethical implications, but they also bear ontological consequences, since "they are evil to the extent that they are not, and insofar as they wish for evil they wish for what is not really there."[44] To be evil means not to be, being evil is equal to non-being. Non-being is Maximus's preoccupation as well, and he sees it as a state in which man is taken over by sins and passions which drive him contrary to his own nature. In this manner he explains the expression "slipped down from below" as meaning that although man "had it well within his power to direct the footsteps of his soul to God, he freely chose to exchange what

violation of it (*Ethica Nichomachea*, I.13, 1103A). Thomas Aquinas will later argue that it is evident that "all virtues are in us by nature, according to aptitude and inchoation, but not according to perfection" (*Summa theologiae* [Lander, Wyo.: The Aquinas Institute, 2012], I-II, q. 63, a. 1), while David Hume will stamp such position as ultimately unphilosophical (*Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978], III.1.2, 475).

39. See Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 21, 1249B.

40. See Maximus, *Liber asceticus*, 6.

41. Maximus, *Mystagogia*, 24 (CCSG 69:67–68).

42. See Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, IV.3.3, 477A.

43. See ibid., III.3.7, 436B.

44. Dionysius, *Epistula* X, 1117B.

is better and real for what is inferior and nonexistent."[45] Deviation from movement according to nature is therefore falling into non-being, but the refusal of mutual communion and interconnectedness also results in dissolution into non-being. Contrary to dissolution and non-being, Christ is the central point of communion, bringing back all beings to himself: "The purpose of this is so that the creations and products of the one God be in no way strangers and enemies to one another . . . , and not run the risk of having their being separated from God to dissolve into nonbeing."[46] What this implies is that communion is the actualization of being, and, in Loudovikos's words, "love as a good and infinitely wise power is the quintessence of the life of beings, actualized as it is in communion."[47] No wonder then why, as we already noted, love is the summit of all virtues: "All the forms of virtue are introduced, fulfilling the power of love, which gathers together what has been separated, once again fashioning the human being in accordance with a single *logos* and mode."[48] This is the call for the return to nature, to one's own authentic being seen in the single *logos* and mode of existence of all humankind and facilitated through love as the culmination of all virtues. As a matter of fact, one of the main attributes of love is precisely to effect unity and communion,[49] and this is what Dionysius also affirms in his exposition of eros,[50] especially in terms of ἔρως κοινωνικός. Such communion both Dionysius and Maximus see as present within the Church, which is a community of love that effects the deification of its members, through sacraments.[51]

As should be evident by now, both of our authors share very similar ideas when it comes to their understanding of love and its connection to deification. Of course, shared views do not imply identity, and it is clear that some aspects of these issues are more developed in Dionysius, while some others are more emphasized in Maximus. Nonetheless, they both see love as the principal mark of creation, incarnation, and deification, which consequently leads to seeing love as the ingredient in the relations between God and the creation, as well as between beings themselves. The discussion thus far has showed that, for Dionysius and Maximus, love stands at

45. Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 7, 1085A.
46. Maximus, *Mystagogia*, 1 (CCSG 69:14).
47. Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology*, 142.
48. Maximus, *Epistula* 2, 400A.
49. See also Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 339–43.
50. See Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, IV.12, 709D.
51. See the sections on ecclesiology in the respective chapters above on deification in Dionysius and Maximus.

the very root of their metaphysical systems, which then abundantly transpires through their anthropology, epistemology, moral philosophy, ecclesiology, and soteriology.

But let us now go back to the wise words of Plato's Diotima, who says "It is impossible to give birth in ugliness, but only in beauty."[52] For Diotima, this giving birth is an expression of an erotic inclination present in all human beings. Eros can therefore never be connected with ugliness, but only with beauty—beauty is the result of love, and beauty is what attracts love. Going back to the initial statement of love as the mode of partaking in immortality, we understand that immortality is achieved through love in beauty. Furthermore, Diotima claims that the beautiful is also linked to the divine: "The ugly is discordant with whatever is divine, whereas the beautiful is accordant."[53] With this idea of beauty as an expression of the divine, we shall examine how Dionysius's and Maximus's accounts of beauty play a role in our topic.

Absolute Beauty and Its Uplifting Power

For both Dionysius and Maximus, God is absolutely transcendent and ineffable, and his essence is unknowable and inaccessible. However, this absolute transcendence and unknowability is remedied through God's manifestations by which he makes himself present in the world. In this way, the world is understood as an image of God, in that it manifests God as effects manifest their cause. Thus Dionysius explains the possibility of ascribing any name to the Godhead since these names are drawn from those things caused.[54] This means that the beauty of the world and of the creation points to the absolute beauty of God. In the same manner Maximus develops his theory of *logoi* as the preexistent ideas contained in God, and he claims that in God "the *logoi* of beautiful things are steadfastly fixed."[55] From these beautiful things, whose *logoi* are in God, we are able to grasp a glimpse of divine beauty by means of cataphatic theology, which, "grounded in the beauty and magnificence of creation, indicates that God is the creator of everything."[56] Thus, absolute beauty, which Dionysius defines as "in itself and by itself the uniquely and the eternally beautiful,"[57] is comprehend-

52. Plato, *Symposium*, 206C.
53. Ibid., 206D.
54. See Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, I.6, 596B.
55. Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 7, 1084B.
56. Ibid., 10, 1168B.
57. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, IV.7, 704A.

ed through the beauty bestowed on all existing things. In the Areopagite's opinion, such absolute beauty cannot be amended, and it cannot have any relative character or be confined by spatial and temporal limitations.[58] This idea is paralleled by Maximus in his view that "whatever is not good and desirable in itself, and that does not attract all motion to itself, strictly speaking cannot be the Beautiful."[59] Therefore, what both the Areopagite and the Confessor are interested in is the idea of absolute simple beauty—beauty in itself—which does not receive its definition from something else.

God as absolute beauty presents himself as both the source, the beginning, and the goal, the end, for all the creation. On the one hand, he is the beginning as the cause of all beings, and on the other, he is their goal, since in him they reach ultimate satisfaction and their motion finds its end. This is what Maximus has in mind when he says that absolute beauty draws all movement toward it, and it is the same idea that we come across in Dionysius who states that beauty "calls [καλοῦν] all things to itself and gathers everything into itself."[60] The gathering of everything in God, and creation's return to God as absolute beauty, is precisely the mystical union with God, the ultimate purpose of all creatures and their deification. The very beauty of the visible world is nothing but an image of a more beautiful world, or better, an invitation to make the journey from the flesh to the spirit, from creation to divinity:

> God established the invisible world and the one that we see. . . . Now if the visible world is so beautiful, of what sort then will the invisible be? And if this latter is better, how much more so God who founded them both? If then the artificer of all that is beautiful is better than all creatures, what reason has the mind for leaving what is best of all to be engrossed in the worst of all? I mean the passions of the flesh.[61]

The visible world is indeed beautiful, and each being does have a share in beauty, but that is not enough—there is something even higher and more beautiful, a world resplendent with uncreated, immaterial beauty which points to the ineffable and magnificent beauty of God as the creator of both worlds. Material objects and images, no matter how beautiful they are, are in fact only a concession to our imperfect fallen nature, which perceives through senses: "Any thinking person realizes that the appearances

58. Ibid.
59. Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 7, 1069D.
60. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, IV.7, 701D.
61. Maximus, *De charitate*, III.72.

of beauty are signs of an invisible loveliness."[62] Humanity's task, then, for both Dionysius and Maximus, is to go beyond appearances, to transcend visible beauty in order to arrive at the divine realities of incomprehensible beauty. The entire arrangement of the world is thus made to facilitate this task that man has before him: expressions such as εὐκοσμία, εὐταξία, ἀναλογία, τάξις, and θέσις are present in both authors; and they denote the beautiful cosmic disposition which results from God's providence.[63] If ugliness is characterized by disorder, disharmony, and disproportion, then their opposites—order, harmony, and proportion—point to the beauty that is the model of imitation whose end is conformity to God as the archetype of beauty. Man must always strive to model himself in likeness to God, just as, in an aesthetic metaphor employed by Dionysius, the artist always keeps an eye on the original.[64] The same attributes denoting the beauty of the world can be applied to the human soul as well—order, disposition, proportion are epithets that characterize a beautiful soul. Such order is reflected through the rule of the rational element of the soul, and it implies renouncing any attachment to the flesh, as well as resisting the devil's tricks by which he tries to destroy the soul's εὐπρέπεια.[65]

The beautiful character of the world, therefore, implies an aesthetic cosmology, but an even stronger element of Dionysius's and Maximus's thought is their aesthetic anthropology, which stems from the idea that man was created in the image of God. "Using the everlasting model of beauty, God has made us in his image,"[66] writes the Areopagite; and Maximus proceeds by saying that the one who illumines his mind and respects God "has added to the natural beauty of the image the voluntary good of likeness."[67] The beauty of the image is therefore something inscribed in human nature by the very act of creation; likeness, on the other hand, is something that is yet to be achieved.

The achievement of likeness Maximus sees as a synergy of contemplation and practice—contemplation of the *logoi* of things reveals and restores the beauty of the image, while practical philosophy, in terms of practicing the commandments and living a virtuous life, leads to the likeness. Let us recall a passage where Christ is seen as the intelligible David:

62. Dionysius, *De coelesti hierarchia*, I.3, 121D.
63. See Roques, *L'univers Dionysien*, 57.
64. See Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, IV.3.1, 473C.
65. See Maximus, *Ad Thalassium*, 49 (CCSG 7:361).
66. Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, III.3.7, 436C.
67. Maximus, *Capita gnostica*, I.13.

He is the shepherd of those who pursue practical philosophy and share, as food, natural contemplation; and he is the king of those who, in accordance with spiritual laws and *logoi*, restore, in returning to the Archetype, the beauty of the image given to them, and who, without intermediary, cling intellectually around the great King of Ages himself, and mirror, so to say, the unapproachable beauty.[68]

Natural contemplation, in synergy with practical philosophy, therefore restores the beauty of the image in which human beings were originally created, and the best example of this kind of worthiness is Moses, who "taking God himself as the type and exemplar of the virtues, he modeled himself on him, like a picture expertly capturing the likeness of the archetype."[69] While the interaction between contemplation and practice within spiritual development is thoroughly elaborated by Maximus, similar ideas are also to be found in Dionysius, although to a lesser extent. A good example, however, of the contemplation–practice interplay is found in a passage discussing the possibility of discovering hidden beauty by contemplative minds:

They reveal themselves solely to minds capable of grasping them. They shine within our souls only by way of appropriate images, images which, like themselves, have the virtue of being incorruptible. Hence virtuous conformity to God [θεοειδοῦς ἀρετῆς] can only appear as an authentic image of its object when it rivets its attention on that conceptual and fragrant beauty. On this condition—and only on this condition—can the soul impress itself and reproduce within itself an imitation of loveliness.[70]

The Areopagite here shows his awareness of the importance of both elements of spiritual development, namely, contemplation and practice. The former allows the mind to grasp the beauty hidden behind and beyond images, while the latter implies Godlike virtue by which the soul reproduces and imitates divine beauty. The "virtuous conformity to God" points to the ethical component of Dionysius's aesthetics, as it testifies that simple contemplation and comprehension of beauty are not enough in human ascent to God—the process requires virtues, practical philosophy, as well, which implies that it has a personal, individual character. In terms of the contemplative discovery of hidden beauty and the practical achievement of a virtuous life, both Dionysius and Maximus feel strongly about abandoning attachment to matter and purification of passions, as the prerequisites

68. Maximus, *Ad Thalassium*, 53 (CCSG 7:433).
69. Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 10, 1117C.
70. Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, IV.3.1, 473B.

of the human ascent to God. Thus, the Areopagite describes contemplative people as gazing solely at conceptual things and refusing to be dragged down toward empty and low appearances,[71] while Maximus recalls Abraham as having abandoned "the relation to and propensity toward the flesh, the senses, and the sensible realities."[72] If such abandonment is not effected then the soul will fall into disorder, which in turn will destroy its beauty and deliver it to the enemy, the devil. Just as the Confessor has pointed out that the visible world is indeed beautiful, but that the beauty of the invisible world and of God as their creator is much more magnificent, it follows that leaving behind the visible material things perceived by the senses is necessary, in order to approach the world of invisible beauty, which is, so to say, perceived by the mind.[73] A metaphor of visible beauty's illusion is the Egyptian woman who laid hold not of Joseph, but of his clothes—in the same manner those who remained attached to the beauty of visible things in fact "mistakenly worshipped the creature instead of the Creator."[74] This is therefore the purpose of such a strong affirmation of contemplation and practice—not to be attached to the creation, not to be satisfied with material things of contingent beauty, but to go forward in order to reach the Creator and his absolute beauty, beauty in itself:

> If those whom you describe as pious are actually lovers of things basely sought on earth, then they have certainly fallen away from the yearning for God. I cannot therefore understand why they are called pious when they do this injustice to what is truly lovable and divine, when they so evilly abandon these out of a preference for things unworthy of their ambition and of their yearning. If they were to yearn for the truly real, if their desire were for this, then there should be joy when they obtain it. Would they not be closer to the virtues of the angels if, in their longing for the things of God, they shed their attachment to material things and bravely trained themselves for this in their quest for the beautiful?[75]

Erotic desire, aesthetics, and ethics, all come together in the approximation to God, which in turn brings true joy and satisfaction. This path of erotic movement toward God and detachment from earthly things,

71. See ibid., IV.3.1, 473D–476A.

72. Maximus, *Ad Thalassium*, 49 (CCSG 7:313).

73. "Maximus is pointing to a problem that lies not with material things per se but with our impassioned and purely sensual approach to them: and this is spiritually harmful not least because it misrepresents the material world in its true essence," Elizabeth Theokritoff, "The High Word's Mystery Play: Creation and Salvation in St Maximus the Confessor," in *Creation and Salvation: A Mosaic of Selected Classic Christian Theologies*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012), 103.

74. Maximus, *Capita gnostica*, II.73.

75. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, VIII.8, 896BC.

together with the acquisition of virtues, Dionysius calls the quest for the beautiful. Such a quest, however, is not an easy task, but requires arduous efforts; it is a battle, a contest,

> the sacred contests which, with Christ as his trainer, he must undertake. For it is Christ who, as God, arranges the match, as sage lays down the rules, as beauty is the worthy prize for the victors, and, more divinely, as goodness is present with the athletes, defending their freedom and guaranteeing their victory over the forces of death and destruction. And so the initiate will quite gladly hurl himself into what he knows to be divine contests, and he will follow and scrupulously observe the wise rules of the game. His firm hope will be to earn the fine reward of a place in the order commanded by the good lord and leader of the contest. He will follow the divine tracks established by the goodness of the first of athletes. In trials that imitate the divine, he will do battle with every activity and with every being which stand in the way of his divinization.[76]

The Areopagite depicts here a Christocentric vision of the entire life of a Christian, since Christ is present in every step of the believer's path—he arranges the "match," he stands by the side of every human being, and he guarantees them victory and reward, which is nothing but divine beauty or, in other words, deification itself. The noetic and ethical components of this sacred contest have been already pointed out, but with all this emphasis on contemplation and renouncement of the flesh, what place is there for matter, and what happens with the body as the material ingredient of the very human being? In response to this question, both Dionysius and Maximus stand firmly in their positive understanding of matter and body, a view that is rooted in their belief that the world is a theophany, a manifestation of God, which makes God present even in material objects.

In the Areopagite's view, this is how human beings are able to gain knowledge of God: "God is therefore known in all things and as distinct from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing. Of him there is conception, reason, understanding, *touch*, *perception*, opinion, *imagination*, name, and many other things."[77] If everything is created by God, then he is known in every touch and in every perception, just as the cause is known in and through its effects. Since human beings know through the senses, then the mind, going from effects to the cause, can reach a partial but nevertheless real understanding that "the divine Wisdom is the source, the cause, the substance, the perfection, the protector,

76. Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, II.3.6, 401D–404A.
77. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, VII.3, 872A.

and the goal."[78] Our senses are like "an echo of the wisdom." Through the senses the mind "reads" the Creator, while in the light, contained in every created thing, the mind perceives the unapproachable Light. Thus, all creatures are "analogous" to God, and so the way in which God is known is analogous; this is precisely the term (ἀναλόγως) that Dionysius himself uses.[79] In a similar vein, Maximus explains the manifestation of God as being effected in both intelligible and sensible domains. God, in fact, mingles with the sensible:

> Not only did the divine and incorporeal essences of intelligible things constitute representations of God's ineffable glory, acquiring legitimately and proportionately within themselves the whole incomprehensible loveliness of inapproachable beauty, but, in addition, traces of God's own majesty intermingled [ἐγκαταμίξαι] with sensible things, things that fall far short of intelligible essences. These traces of God's majesty are able to transport the human mind, which uses them as a vehicle, infallibly to God.[80]

Sensible things, which "fall far short of intelligible essences," therefore, represent a concession to human nature and serve as the mind's aid in its ascent to God. Given the fallen human state, the divinity is known through the aid of what Dionysius calls "sacred veils." Speaking of the light and divine rays, he claims that the divine ray "can enlighten us only by being upliftingly concealed in a variety of sacred veils which the Providence of the Father adapts to our nature as human beings."[81] These veils, apart from being epistemologically important, are in fact manifestations of God's love and goodness toward humanity, as they represent a concession to human imperfect nature and its mode of perception:

> Hence, any thinking person realizes that the appearances of beauty are signs of an invisible loveliness. The beautiful odors which strike the senses are representations of a conceptual diffusion. Material lights are images of the outpouring of an immaterial gift of light. The thoroughness of sacred discipleship indicates the immense contemplative capacity of the mind. Order and rank here below are a sign of the harmonious ordering toward the divine realm. The reception of the most divine Eucharist is a symbol of participation in Jesus. And so it goes for all the gifts transcendently received by the beings of heaven, gifts which are granted to us in a symbolic mode.[82]

78. Ibid., VII.2, 868C.

79. See William Riordan, *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 180–83.

80. Maximus, *Ad Thalassium*, 51 (CCSG 7:395).

81. Dionysius, *De coelesti hierarchia*, I.2, 121BC.

82. Ibid., I.3, 121D–124A.

Veils are therefore identified with the appearances of beauty, odors, light, and the Eucharist. All of this aesthetic-poetic language does not imply, however, Dionysius's artistic interest, but it manifests his idea to show the divine intention to facilitate human reception of the revelation. The sacred veils not only make the divine light perceptible to the human eye, but they also incite human beings to go beyond mere perception.[83] The splendor of the interior of churches and of the rites which incite going beyond, in order to reach otherworldly upliftings, is what happens within the hierarchy in which the order of hierarchs "makes known the works of God by way of the sacred symbols and prepares the postulants to contemplate and participate in the holy sacraments."[84] This sacramental and liturgical idea means that the path to God leads through the Church, whose goal is deification, as union with and likeness to God. It is not surprising, then, that Dionysius dedicates so much space to the detailed description and contemplation of every sacrament in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.[85] As a matter of fact, the entire hierarchical action depends on the capacity of material things to bear the light of God.[86]

Sacramental and liturgical efficacy within the domain of deification is strongly underlined by Maximus as well:

> There they behold the light of the invisible and ineffable glory and become themselves together with the angels on high open to the blessed purity. After this, as the climax of everything, comes the distribution of the sacrament, which transforms into itself and renders similar to the causal good by grace and participation those who worthily share in it. To them is there lacking nothing of this good that is possible and attainable for me, so that they also can be and be called gods by adoption through grace because all of God entirely fills them and leaves no part of them empty of his presence.[87]

The end of the upward journey of the believer is the ultimate unknowing, the divine darkness. However, even if the final goal of ascent is the formless domain, this road belongs with those material things that possess form: "So there is nothing absurd in rising up, as we do, from obscure images to the single Cause of everything, rising with eyes that see beyond the cosmos to

83. See Mosche Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 175.

84. Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, V.1.6, 505D.

85. See the section on hierarchies in the chapter above on deification in Dionysius; and Ivanovic, "Ecclesiology of Dionysius the Areopagite."

86. See Golitzin, *Mystagogy*, 202.

87. Maximus, *Mystagogia*, 21 (CCSG 69:48).

contemplate all things."[88] With the use of a sensible, and not just intelligible, realm, an anagogical function is being fulfilled: from the visible realm one is uplifted to the invisible one, and from the sensible experience to the spiritual one, and thus the experience of God becomes possible. However, there is a warning which should be borne in mind constantly—the ascent only starts at sensible things; it cannot be stopped there, and the mind cannot be satisfied with mere material objects: "For one should not speak of true contemplation what I call the mere surface of sensible things, as did the fools whom the Greeks called wise," exclaims Maximus, and continues by stating that "among us they would never have been called wise because they could not or would not recognize God from his works."[89] This is yet another fervid invitation to go beyond the sensible and to use visible symbols only as the starting point of the passage from one world to the other. The idea of the transference from one realm to the other is strengthened by Dionysius when he speaks of the hierarchs, who "using images derived from the senses they spoke of the transcendent," and they do it because "in a divine fashion it needs perceptible things to lift us up into the domain of conceptions."[90] In fact, every type of symbolic depiction hides a mysterious and anagogical meaning:

> The Word of God furthermore attributes to the heavenly beings the form of bronze, of electrum, of multicolored stones, and if it does so the reason lies in the fact that electrum, which contains gold and silver, symbolizes both the incorruptible, priceless, unfailing, and unpolluted radiance of gold as well as the gleam, the gloss, the splendor, and the heavenly glow of silver. As for bronze, it recalls either fire or gold, for the reasons given. With regard to the multicolored stones, these must be taken to work symbolically as follows: white for light, red for fire, yellow for gold, green for youthful vitality. Indeed you will find that each form carries an uplifting explanation of the representational images.[91]

Images, therefore, have for both Dionysius and Maximus pedagogical and anagogical value, in that they call for the removal of the "veils" and serve as the starting point for the ascent to the ineffable and incomprehensible God. As a result, images not only act upon man's rational and intellectual faculties, but they also influence his subconscious and emotional aspect. Thus, our authors' aesthetic theory is the meeting point of God's

88. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, V.7, 821B.
89. Maximus, *Mystagogia*, 23 (CCSG 69:50).
90. Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, I.5, 376D–377A.
91. Dionysius, *De coelesti hierarchia*, XV.6, 336BC.

absolute transcendence and his immanence to the world, and it represents the start of man's flight to heaven.[92] In the famous scheme of rest–procession–return, what starts with the ineffable transcendence of the divinity proceeds through the spatial-temporal domain of symbols; and in the reverse direction, it rests in the very beginning, that is, in divine transcendence. This road means moving from sensible to intelligible, so that the procession into multitude is balanced by the return, or ascent, from the multitude to the unity.[93]

Bearing in mind this positive view of the material world as the starting point of man's ascent to God, it is not surprising that both Dionysius and Maximus positively appreciate the body as well. If man was created in God's image and likeness, and if the complete man means a composite of body and soul, then the body also is created by God and cannot be evil.[94] Thus, salvation and deification not only concern the soul, but they must also apply to the entire human person, in both soul and body. Maximus declares this view when discussing how physical and spiritual food is used for growth and sustenance:

> When it receives through this food eternal blessedness indwelling in it, it becomes God through participation in divine grace by itself ceasing from all activities of the mind and sense and with them the natural activities of the body which become Godlike along with it in a participation of deification proper to it. In this state only God shines forth through body and soul when their natural features are transcended in overwhelming glory.[95]

Clearly, deification presupposes the cessation of all noetic and physical activities, as noted earlier, but it also does not imply the annihilation or destruction of the body. On the contrary, the body becomes Godlike and reflects the divine light.[96] The Confessor reinforces this stance in claiming the deification of the whole man through the famous motif of the reciprocity of incarnation and deification: "Man as a whole will be divinized, being made God by the grace of God who became man. Man will remain wholly

92. See also Maximus, *Ad Thalassium*, 49 (CCSG 7:363).

93. See Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*, 112.

94. I discuss this issue in regard to Dionysius in the chapter above on beauty, as well as in the section on ecclesiology, concerning funeral rites and baptism, in the chapter on deification.

95. Maximus, *Capita gnostica*, II.88.

96. Similarly, for Gregory Nazianzen, "the corporeal is not merely an instrument the human spirit uses for encountering God, but rather is itself an object of liberation by God," Sigurd Bergmann, "'Now the Spirit Dwells among Us …': The Spirit as Liberator of Nature in the Trinitarian Cosmology of Gregory of Nazianz," in *Creation and Salvation: A Mosaic of Selected Classic Christian Theologies*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012), 63.

man in soul and body, owing to his nature, but will become wholly God in soul and body owing to the grace and the splendor of the blessed glory of God, which is wholly appropriate to him."[97]

The idea of both the soul and the body, and not just the soul, as deified represents the fullest affirmation of humanity in its entirety from the Christian point of view.[98] It also represents a successful attempt to reconcile the two contrasted characteristics of God—his transcendence and immanence. In this way, also apophatic theology and deification are brought into play—while it is not possible to say anything about God, who is incomprehensible and ineffable, it is still possible to feel his presence in the world, through the sensible things through which he chose to manifest himself. Deification does not depend on human nature alone, but it is given by God's grace. However, man cannot completely depend on grace, nor can he completely rely on his own capacities. In this sense, deification should be understood as cooperation between God and man, as an ongoing process, and not as a single event. So also, God's choice to reveal himself through symbols should be understood as one of his contributions to that cooperation, while man's ascent from sensible to intelligible, through symbols, is an integrative part of the process. God is hidden and incomprehensible, but his hiddenness and unapproachability does not mean absence. On the contrary, God reveals himself, he descends and manifests himself, which is why the main themes in this context are God and Revelation, theophany; and so every one of God's creative activities is in fact a theophany. Thus, he has established a world order which contains images and likenesses of divine archetypes.[99] This idea is reflected in the entire set of Byzantine aesthetic endeavors, which testify to accentuated transcendence in all artistic and cultural production. It had deep implications for many other aspects of Christian thought and action, which have their reflections in, for example, ecclesiology and art; and it contributed to what was called material mysticism in Byzantium, in terms of the aesthetic experience, perceived through the magnificence of material beauty as a precursor to and indication of the future age, so that the "pleasure of sights and sounds represented promises of celestial bliss."[100] This connection with the visible and invisible, sensible

97. Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 7, 1088C.

98. Adam Cooper has dedicated his book *The Body in St Maximus* to the study of this issue. See also Hyland, *Plato and the Question of Beauty*, 50, on challenging the supposed Platonic hatred of the body.

99. See Georges Florovsky, *Vostochnye otsy V–VIII vekov* (Paris: YMCA, 1990), 104.

100. Tatarkiewicz, *Medieval Aesthetics*, 36.

beauty and its hidden intelligible beauty, led to the idea that "much that was most vital in Byzantine art came into being through the effort to apprehend and to convey a hidden meaning."[101]

The appreciation of the world and of the body in terms of worshipping the Creator found its expression even during the iconoclast controversy. The influence, both explicit and implicit, of thinkers such as Dionysius and Maximus is evident in the doctrines of the iconophile party. Just as an example of this point, I quote here a passage by John of Damascus: "I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing matter, through which my salvation was worked."[102] This apparently bold statement on matter as the vehicle of salvation can be properly understood only if bearing in mind the tradition to which Damascene belonged. It corrects the idea of the body as a prison of the soul or of the visible world as a worthless copy of the celestial one, and it heavily relies on the ideas which we are able to see in Dionysius and Maximus.[103] In the attempt to grasp the development of certain philosophical and theological doctrines, the proper understanding of such a conception of beauty might as well help to remedy the distinction, as some have argued, between the Beautiful and the Sublime as categories belonging to classical and Christian art, respectively.[104] While it is true that "purely" Neoplatonic aesthetics cannot be taken as the source of early Christian art or of entire Christian aesthetics, it might, however, be perceived as a significant, though mediated, part thereof. Theories that argue how the Sublime was the only aesthetic concept known by the Byzantines fail to acknowledge their intellectual inheritance, formed by both Greek and Christian elements.[105] This implies that the study of Dionysius's and Maximus's (and not just their) aesthetics, therefore has to be taken into account when dealing with Byzantine (or Christian) art in general, since it manifests a quite strong presence of the idea of the Beautiful and shows

101. Gervase Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 39.

102. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. Andrew Louth. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), *Oratio*, I.16.

103. On Dionysius's influence on the iconophile doctrine, see Filip Ivanovic, *Symbol and Icon: Dionysius the Areopagite and the Iconoclastic Crisis* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2010). On Maximus's influence, with a somewhat underestimating approach to Dionysius, see Viktor M. Zhivov, "The Mystagogia of Maximus the Confessor and the Development of the Byzantine Theory of the Image," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1987): 349–76.

104. See, for example, Panayiotis Michelis, "Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Byzantine Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 11, no. 1 (1952): 21–45.

105. Ibid., 45.

its appropriation in the early Christian sphere which greatly determined further developments of artistic expressions.

In addition to helping understand certain historical developments, a further study of the concept of beauty would perhaps return it to the focus of philosophical or theological aesthetics, a place which it has lost in postmodern society. Contemporary aesthetics seems to be concerned with the idea of beauty as one of many aesthetic properties,[106] which is not surprising given the postmodern devaluation of beauty as part of human experience and reflection.[107] Contrary to its possible axiological understanding, beauty is today perceived in a more existential way: "What is decisive for us today, when we use the word beauty, is whether a person or a thing, a scene or a place makes us feel that we are there, whether these things, people, or scenes contribute to intensifying our existence."[108] I think that the Byzantine idea of the beautiful created world as a manifestation of God's beauty could accommodate even this new existential need for beauty, by helping us relate to other human beings and other created beings in an aesthetic context.

Concluding Remarks

Going back to our topic, Dionysius's and Maximus's thought is wholly permeated by and dedicated to deification as the final goal of the creation. This goal is achieved through different stages, but it is ultimately a gift of God. Despite being so, deification is not granted without personal effort on the part of the creature, and these efforts are reflected in its intellective and practical activities, as a cooperation which is responsible, definite, and decisive.[109] However, even if personal, this process is not solitary—it all happens in a community, whose members are related by love. This community of love is the Church as the place in which sacraments are administered and as an earthly image of the kingdom of heaven and body of Christ. This brings about the union of beings and their participation in the body of Christ which, according to the eschatological vision, will make them members of Christ's body, an idea that, according to Cooper, represents

106. See Nick Zangwill, "Beauty," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. J. Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 325.

107. See Edward Farley, *Faith and Beauty: A Theological Aesthetic* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), esp. 117–20.

108. Gernot Böhme, "On Beauty," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 39 (2010): 30–31.

109. See Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*, trans. Norman Russell (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 187.

the fulfillment of Maximus's ontology of creation.[110] However, this union is not effected only in relation to human beings; on the contrary, it encompasses the entire creation, recapitulated by Christ, who sets the model for human beings. The centrality of Christ and his work is a characteristic of the doctrine of human deification, and it is with this in mind that Panayiotis Nellas argues that "the real anthropological meaning of deification is Christification."[111] The importance of Christ's work becomes clear in a passage from Maximus worth quoting at length:

> And with us and for us he encompassed the extremes of the whole creation through the means, as his own parts, and he joined them around himself, each with the other, tightly and indissolubly: paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, the sensible and intelligible, since like us he possesses a body, sense perception, soul, and intellect, to which (as his own parts) he associated individually the extreme that was thoroughly akin to each of them (that is, his parts), according to the mode described above, and he recapitulated in himself, in a manner appropriate to God, all things, showing that the whole creation is one, as if it were another human being, completed by the mutual coming together of all its members, inclining toward itself in the wholeness of its existence, according to one, unique, simple, undefined, and unchangeable idea: that it comes from nothing. Accordingly, all creation admits of one and the same, absolutely undifferentiated principle: that its existence is preceded by nonexistence.[112]

As we have seen, both love and beauty act as fundamental elements of Dionysius's and Maximus's metaphysical systems, and as such they form indispensable parts of all components of these systems—in this sense we were able to examine these concepts throughout anthropology, psychology, epistemology, moral philosophy, ecclesiology, cosmology, and soteriology. Now, a few points can be made regarding comparative divergences between our two authors. First, while their writings are clearly impregnated with the discourse on love, it might be said that Dionysius is more interested in love's ontological and cosmological dimensions, while Maximus takes it further and develops a, so to say, erotic psychology, where ἔρως and ἀγάπη are ascribed to the concupiscible and irascible elements of the soul. Furthermore, Maximus differs in developing concepts of a negative and, not dominant but still present, positive self-love. This erotic psychology might also be the reason for terminological difference—the

110. See Cooper, *Body in Saint Maximus*, 112.
111. Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, 39.
112. Maximus, *Ambiguorum liber*, 41, 1312AB.

Areopagite explicitly considers the terms as synonymous, while Maximus, on the other hand, maintains a certain difference between the two, and in a few instances he combines them into one phrase, such as "yearning of charity" and similar phrases. This terminological difference works the other way around when it comes to beauty. Namely, Dionysius ascribes the terms κάλλος, ὡραιότης, and εὐπρέπεια with fair consistency to somewhat different aspects of beauty, while the Confessor uses them synonymously; and just like he does with love, he often combines them in phrases such as "the loveliness of divine beauty." In addition, the understanding of beauty is much more developed in Dionysius than in Maximus, and while the former presents a rather systematic treatment of the concept, in the latter it appears with much less frequency.

Nevertheless, the previous discussion has shown that similarities and convergences between our two authors are much more evident than their divergences, and it should be evident that the erotic-aesthetic dimension of deification is a central and crucial aspect of soteriology. The exemplification of the relationship between love, beauty, and deification we might find in the following sentence by Maximus: "No created being which is in motion has yet come to rest, either because it has not yet attained its first and sole cause … or because it does not yet find itself within its ultimate desired end."[113] We might develop this further by saying that each created thing is created out of love, that the ultimately desirable is at the same time ultimately beautiful, and thus it enflames all creation with love which sets it on the quest to possess it—the possession of the ultimately desirable being nothing else but deification. Deification is therefore union in love with absolute beauty, it is the cessation of erotic movement which reaches its end in God, who is hailed as Love and Beauty. Nevertheless, while we have perhaps been able to trace the "how" and "why" of deification and shed some more light on this process through examining its features in our two thinkers, we have been unable to respond to the "what" of deification; consequently, this and probably any other study of deification must accept the apophatic character of its topic. Such apophaticism marked the entire tradition of deification, from the Cappadocians and Dionysius to Gregory Palamas, who writes:

> We, who have written much about hesychia (sometimes at the urging of the fathers, sometimes in response to the questions of the brothers) have never dared hitherto to write about deification. But now, since there is a necessity to speak,

113. Ibid., 7, 1072C.

we will speak words of piety (by the grace of the Lord), but words inadequate to describe it. For even when spoken about, deification remains ineffable, and (as the Fathers teach us) can be given a name only by those who have received it.[114]

While the ineffability of the very character of deification may be true, we are however still able to draw from our ancestral thinkers certain elements that characterize it, which I hope this study has shown. This concluding chapter opened with Plato's Diotima, so let us paraphrase her words now and say that loving generation in the beautiful instills immortality. In Christian terms, this loving generation, often called rebirth or spiritual birth, as the restoration and regeneration of our true nature in loving community with God and creation, is effected in a world of beauty and is perfected in absolute beauty, where it reaches immortality and infinity by being wholly deified. Bearing this in mind, let us conclude that the world in which we live is a beautiful world, full of love, whose ultimate purpose is to be deified.

114. Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), III.1.32.

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